# THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO RENAISSANCE PHILOSOPHY

*The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Philosophy* provides an introduction to a complex period of change in the subject matter and practice of philosophy. The philosophy of the fourteenth through sixteenth centuries is often seen as transitional between the scholastic philosophy of the Middle Ages and modern philosophy, but the essays collected here, by a distinguished international team of contributors, call these assumptions into question, emphasizing both the continuity with scholastic philosophy and the role of Renaissance philosophy in the emergence of modernity. They explore the ways in which the science, religion, and politics of the period reflect and are reflected in its philosophical life, and they emphasize the dynamism and pluralism of a period which saw both new perspectives and enduring contributions to the history of philosophy. This will be an invaluable guide for students of philosophy, intellectual historians, and all who are interested in Renaissance thought.

JAMES HANKINS is Professor of History at Harvard University and editor of *Renaissance Civic Humanism: Reappraisals and Reflections* (2000, 2004).

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# THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO RENAISSANCE PHILOSOPHY

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# CONTENTS

*List of figures* vii
*Acknowledgments* viii
*Notes on contributors* ix
*Chronology* xii

1 Introduction
JAMES HANKINS 1

PART I CONTINUITY AND REVIVAL 11

2 The philosopher and Renaissance culture
ROBERT BLACK 13

3 Humanism, scholasticism, and Renaissance philosophy
JAMES HANKINS 30

4 Continuity and change in the Aristotelian tradition
LUCA BIANCHI 49

5 The revival of Platonic philosophy
CHRISTOPHER S. CELENZA 72

6 The revival of Hellenistic philosophies
JILL KRAYE 97

7 Arabic philosophy and Averroism
DAG NIKOLAUS HASSE 113



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8 How to do magic, and why: philosophical prescriptions
BRIAN P. COPENHAVER 137

PART II TOWARD MODERN PHILOSOPHY 171

9 Nicholas of Cusa and modern philosophy
DERMOT MORAN 173

10 Lorenzo Valla and the rise of humanist dialectic
LODI NAUTA 193

11 The immortality of the soul
PAUL RICHARD BLUM 211

12 Philosophy and the crisis of religion
PETER HARRISON 234

13 Hispanic scholastic philosophy
JOHN P. DOYLE 250

14 New visions of the cosmos
MIGUEL A. GRANADA 270

15 Organizations of knowledge
ANN M. BLAIR 287

16 Humanistic and scholastic ethics
DAVID A. LINES 304

17 The problem of the prince
ERIC NELSON 319

18 The significance of Renaissance philosophy
JAMES HANKINS 338

*Appendix: Brief biographies of Renaissance philosophers* 346
*Bibliography* 361
*Index* 401



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# FIGURES


8.1 Myrobalans *page* 138
8.2 Pleasures and planets 144
8.3 Evaluating magic 149
8.4 Geode 152
8.5 Crinoid stem 152
8.6 Lion demon 154
8.7 Concentric spheres 155
8.8 Design for a scorpion talisman 159
8.9 Planetary levels of healing 161
9.1 Source: *Opera Nicolai Cusae Cardinalis*, Paris 1514, vol. I, fol. XLVI verso 189




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# CHRONOLOGY

| | |
|---|---|
| 1304 | Birth of Francesco Petrarca (d. 1374) |
| 1327 | Condemnation of John of Jandun and Marsilius of Padua for heresy |
| 1348–9 | Black Death |
| 1367/70 | Petrarca writes *On His Own Ignorance and That of Many Others* |
| 1370 | Birth of Leonardo Bruni (d. 1444) |
| 1378 | Beginning of Great Schism in the Western Catholic Church |
| 1396 | Biagio Pelacani of Parma condemned by ecclesiastical authorities in Pavia for teaching materialistic doctrines |
| 1397–9 | Manuel Chrysoloras teaches Greek in Florence |
| 1401 | Birth of Nicholas of Cusa (d. 1464) |
| 1403 | Birth of Bessarion (d. 1472) |
| 1406 | Birth of Lorenzo Valla (d. 1457) |
| 1414–18 | Council of Constance marks the end of the Great Schism |
| 1417 | Poggio Bracciolini rediscovers the text of Lucretius (1417); Leonardo Bruni initiates the humanist project to retranslate Aristotle with his new version of the *Nicomachean Ethics* |
| 1420 | Birth of Nicoletto Vernia (d. 1499) |
| 1431–49 | Council of Basel |
| 1433 | Birth of Marsilio Ficino (d. 1499); Ambrogio Traversari publishes his translation of Diogenes Laertius |
| 1437–9 | Council of Ferrara–Florence brings about a temporary union between the Eastern Orthodox and the Western Catholic Church |
| 1439 | First version of Lorenzo Valla's *Reploughing of Dialectic and Philosophy* |
| 1439–40 | Nicholas of Cusa composes *On Learned Ignorance* |
| 1440 | Valla attacks the authenticity of the Donation of Constantine |



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| | |
|---|---|
| *c.* 1440 | Approximate date of the invention of the printing press |
| 1449 | Birth of Lorenzo de' Medici (d. 1492) |
| 1453 | The fall of Constantinople to Mehmed II brings an end to the Eastern Roman or Byzantine Empire |
| 1454 | Birth of Ermolao Barbaro (d. 1493) |
| 1462 | Birth of Pietro Pomponazzi (d. 1525) |
| 1463 | Birth of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (d. 1494) |
| 1465 | Sweynheim and Pannartz publish the first book printed in Italy, Cicero's *On the Orator* |
| *c.* 1466 | Birth of Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam (d. 1536) |
| 1469 | Birth of Niccolò Machiavelli (d. 1527); publication of Bessarion's *Against the Calumniator of Plato* |
| *c.* 1470 | Birth of Agostino Nifo (d. 1538) |
| 1473 | First edition of Lucretius |
| 1473–80 | Ermolao Barbaro's new versions of Themistius spark a rediscovery of the Greek commentators on Aristotle |
| 1478 | Birth of Thomas More (d. 1535) |
| 1482 | First edition of Ficino's *Platonic Theology* |
| 1483 | Birth of Martin Luther (d. 1546) |
| 1484 | Ficino's complete Latin translation of Plato published |
| 1486 | Giovanni Pico della Mirandola publishes his *900 Theses* and the *Oration on the Dignity of Man*; Flavius Mithridates translates Cabalistic texts for Pico |
| 1489 | Ficino publishes his handbook of magic, the *De vita*, and is investigated by the Inquisition; Pietro Barozzi, the bishop of Padua, forbids public disputation at the University of Padua on the Averroist doctrine of the unicity of the intellect |
| 1492 | The discovery of America by Christopher Columbus; the death of Lorenzo de' Medici; the expulsion of Jews from Spain; birth of Juan Luis Vives (d. 1540); Ficino's Latin translation of Plotinus is printed |
| 1494 | Louis XII of France invades Italy; the Medici are expelled from Florence; death of Pico della Mirandola and Angelo Poliziano; foundation of the Aldine Press by Aldus Manutius |
| 1495–8 | First collected edition of Aristotle in Greek printed by Aldus Manutius |
| 1499–1526 | Works of Simplicius published in Venice |
| 1503–51 | Most of Philoponus is published in Greek |
| 1509 | Birth of John Calvin (d. 1564) and Bernardino Telesio (d. 1588) |



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| | |
|---|---|
| 1513 | The Fifth Lateran Council defines the immortality of the soul as a dogma of the Catholic Church. Return of the Medici to Florence; Machiavelli writes *The Prince* |
| 1513–36 | Works of Alexander of Aphrodisias published in Venice |
| *c.* 1514–19 | Machiavelli writes the *Discourses* |
| 1515 | Birth of Petrus Ramus (d. 1572) |
| 1516 | Publication of More's *Utopia*, Erasmus' edition of the New Testament in Greek, and Pomponazzi's treatise *On the Immortality of the Soul*; the latter treatise is burned in Venice |
| 1517 | Outbreak of the Reformation following the publication of Luther's *95 Theses*; the teaching of Lucretius is banned in Florence |
| 1518 | Pomponazzi is condemned by the Fifth Lateran Council and recants his errors |
| 1519–22 | Ferdinand Magellan's expedition circumnavigates the world; Spanish conquest of Mexico |
| 1526 | Francisco de Vitoria, OP, is elected to the chair of theology in Salamanca |
| 1528 | Baldassare Castiglione's *Courtier* published |
| 1529 | Birth of Francesco Patrizi (d. 1597); Diet of Speyer in which the term "Protestant" is first used of those who protested against the banning of Luther's teachings |
| 1531 | First publication of Machiavelli's *Discourses on Livy* |
| 1532 | First publication of Machiavelli's *Prince* |
| 1533 | Birth of Jacopo Zabarella (d. 1589) and Michel de Montaigne (d. 1592) |
| 1534 | First Greek edition of Themistius (Latin translations 1481 and 1499) |
| 1535 | Founding of New Spain in North and Central America and the Caribbean |
| 1536 | John Calvin settles in Geneva and publishes the first edition of his *Institutes of Christian Religion*; birth of Luis de Molina (d. 1600) |
| 1540 | The Jesuit Order, founded by Ignatius of Loyola, is approved by Pope Paul III |
| 1543 | Publication of Copernicus' *On the Revolutions of the Celestial Spheres*, Vesalius' *De fabrica humani corporis*; Petrus Ramus' attack on Aristotelian logic, the *Aristotelicae animadversiones* |
| 1545–63 | Council of Trent |



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|---|---|
| 1547 | Birth of Justus Lipsius (d. 1606) |
| 1548 | Birth of Giordano Bruno (d. 1600) and Francisco Suárez, SJ (d. 1617) |
| 1553 | Michael Servetus is executed in Geneva for heresy |
| 1554 | Sebastian Castellio publishes *Whether Heretics Should Be Persecuted*, supporting freedom of thought and attacking theocracy |
| 1559 | Treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis ends the first phase of the religious wars between Catholic and Protestants; first edition of Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*; first publication of an Index of Prohibited Books by the Roman Inquisition |
| 1561 | Birth of Francis Bacon (d. 1626) |
| 1562 | First edition of Sextus Empiricus' *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* |
| 1562–98 | French Wars of Religion |
| 1564 | Birth of Galileo Galilei (d. 1642) |
| 1565 | First edition of Telesio's *De rerum natura iuxta propria principia* is published |
| 1568 | Birth of Tommaso Campanella (d. 1639) |
| 1571 | Foundation of the Holy Congregation of the Index of Prohibited Books by Pope Pius V |
| 1572 | Petrus Ramus killed in the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre |
| 1573 | Henri II Estienne publishes the first collection of Presocratic fragments |
| 1576 | Francesco de' Vieri the Younger becomes the first university teacher of Platonic philosophy in Florence; Francisco Sánchez publishes *Quod nihil scitur*, a standard work of skeptical philosophy |
| 1580 | First edition of Montaigne's *Essays* |
| 1583 | Birth of Hugo Grotius (d. 1528) |
| 1584 | Justus Lipsius' *On Constancy* is published, launching a revival of Stoicism |
| 1588 | The Spanish Armada attacks England; Thomas Hobbes is born |
| 1591 | Francesco Patrizi publishes the *Nova de universis philosophia*, an attempt to create a systematic Christian Platonism to replace Aristotelianism |
| 1592 | Birth of Pierre Gassendi (d. 1655) |
| 1594 | Tommaso Campanella arrested by the Inquisition under suspicion of heresy; he is arrested a second time in 1599 and tried for heresy and rebellion, remaining imprisoned for twenty-seven years |



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| | |
|---|---|
| 1596 | Birth of René Descartes (d. 1650); Telesio's *De rerum natura* and Patrizi's *Nova de universis philosophia* are placed on the Index |
| 1598 | Edict of Nantes, granting full civil rights and religious liberty to Protestants in France (later annulled) |
| 1599 | The *Ratio studiorum* is adopted by the Jesuit Order, becoming the most influential school curriculum in the early modern world |
| 1600 | Giordano Bruno burned at the stake for heresy |
| 1601 | Pierre Charron's *De la sagesse* published |
| 1604 | Justus Lipsius publishes *Manuductio ad Stoicam philosophiam* and the *Physiologia Stoicorum*, the first comprehensive accounts of Stoicism as a philosophical system |
| 1605 | Francis Bacon publishes *The Advancement of Learning* |
| 1610 | Galileo publishes *The Starry Messenger*, announcing his astronomical discoveries with a telescope |
| 1620 | Francis Bacon's *Novum organum* |
| 1623 | Tommaso Campanella's *City of the Sun* published |
| 1632 | Galileo's *Dialogue of Two World Systems* attacking Aristotelian physics and astronomy is published and condemned by the Church |
| 1637 | Descartes's *Discourse on Method* |
| 1655 | Gassendi's *Syntagma philosophiae Epicuri*, reviving the philosophy of Epicurus, is published posthumously |



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# 1

JAMES HANKINS

# Introduction

Readers who come to David Hume's *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748) equipped only with the taxonomies provided by modern histories of philosophy – "British empiricism" versus "continental rationalism," scientific versus scholastic, ancients versus moderns – are likely to be taken aback at the way Hume in his first chapter, "Of the Different Species of Philosophy," anatomizes the philosophy of his time. He distinguishes first a moral philosophy that "considers man chiefly as born for action," which regards virtue as the most valuable of objects and "paint[s] her in the most amiable colours, borrowing all helps from poetry and eloquence," treating the subject "in an easy and obvious manner." Moral philosophers of this kind "make us *feel* the difference between vice and virtue; they excite and regulate our sentiments; and so they can but bend our hearts to the love of probity and true honour, they think, that they have fully attained the end of all their labours." But there is a second species of philosophers who "consider man in the light of a reasonable rather than an active being, and endeavor to form his understanding more than cultivate his manners." This kind of philosopher does not address the generality of men but "aim[s] at the approbation of the learned and the wise," seeks "hidden truths" rather than an improvement in the behavior of mankind. Hume claims the first species of philosophy, being "easy and obvious," will always be preferred to the "accurate and abstruse," as is shown by the relative popularity of the first: "the fame of CICERO flourishes at present; but that of ARISTOTLE is utterly decayed. LA BRUYERE passes the seas, and still maintains his reputation: But the glory of MALEBRANCHE is confined to his own nation, and to his own age. And ADDISON, perhaps, will be read with pleasure, when LOCKE shall be entirely forgotten."

Hume goes on to make a second distinction, dividing the "accurate and abstruse" philosophy (now called "metaphysics") into two subspecies, a "false and adulterate metaphysics," and a "true metaphysics." The first is "not properly a science, but arise[s] either from the fruitless efforts of



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human vanity, which would penetrate into subjects utterly inaccessible to the understanding, or from the craft of popular superstitions, which being unable to defend themselves on fair ground raise these entangling brambles to cover and protect their weakness." However, Hume thinks it possible to develop a "true metaphysics" characterized by "accurate and just reasoning" which will act as a remedy against "that abstruse philosophy and metaphysical jargon, which being mixed up with popular superstition renders it in a manner impenetrable to careless reasoners, and gives it the air of science and wisdom." This new philosophy, Hume hopes, will share some of the characteristics of popular moral philosophy by being clearly written and worthy of the attention of the public. And at the end of the *Enquiry* (Section XII) we are told that Hume's new philosophy is actually Academic skepticism, an ancient philosophy "which may be of advantage to mankind" by counteracting the natural dogmatism of humanity without falling into the extremes of Pyrrhonian skepticism. It is a "mitigated skepticism" that preaches "modesty and reserve" in reaching conclusions appropriate to human reason.

Hume's anatomy of philosophy, however strange to contemporary students of early modern thought, will be immediately recognizable to those familiar with the philosophy of the Renaissance. In the Renaissance too one may discern three main species of philosopher, broadly similar to Hume's types. There was the humanist moral philosopher, addressing a general audience in an accessible manner, aiming to effect an increase in public and private virtue. Then there were the professors of philosophy in the universities, who treated abstruse subjects in technical language, addressing professional philosophers and offering solutions to logical, physical and metaphysical problems of interest to their community. These were figures often ridiculed by critics in language similar to Hume's. Finally there were "new" philosophers who claimed to be reforming philosophy, purging it of dogmatism, impiety or superstition, usually by reviving some neglected philosophical school of antiquity.

The similarity between the landscape of Renaissance philosophy and Hume's taxonomy suggests a certain continuity between the thought of the fourteenth through sixteenth centuries, often labeled late medieval or Renaissance or premodern or transitional, and that of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, generally regarded as modern or early modern. Further continuities could be enumerated. These might include the ongoing exploration and revival of the ancient philosophical schools in those five hundred years; the centrality of Aristotle to philosophical curricula, accompanied always by criticism of his educational role and attempts to reform and modernize the Aristotelian tradition from within; the rivalry between metaphysical optimism and voluntarism going back to Avicenna and Ockham



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but renewed in the seventeenth century by Gassendi and Leibniz; the ongoing debate about the autonomy of philosophy and its proper relationship to theology and religious belief. Such is the nature, number and importance of the continuities that it is understandable that some scholars in recent years have questioned the appropriateness of a periodization that begins modern philosophy with Bacon and Descartes. Many themes in the writings of seventeenth-century philosophy, it has been observed, come from traditional sources.[1] To be sure, there is much that is new in seventeenth-century philosophy. The victory of Copernican cosmology, the success of mechanical philosophy and the rejection of ancient authority by some influential philosophers are unquestionably major watersheds in the history of thought. But revolutions in the mental world of Europeans are not lacking in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries either. To these centuries belong, after all, the invention of printing, the discovery of a new hemisphere by Europeans, the religious revolutions of the Protestant and Catholic Reformations, and the rise of absolutism and a centralizing state. It would be difficult to argue that the latter series of events had any less impact on philosophical reflection than the former. The view that modern philosophy begins in the seventeenth century clearly has much more to do with the "conversational partners" preferred by modern philosophers, about which more will be said in the conclusion of this volume. Here it will merely be observed that, from the point of view of intellectual history, any project to understand the genealogy and nature of modernity cannot fail to give Renaissance philosophy a central place.

This is hardly a new idea, and indeed tracing the origins of modern philosophy back to the Renaissance was the project of Ernst Cassirer's *Individuum und Kosmos in der Philosophie der Renaissance* (1927), arguably the most influential study of Renaissance philosophy in the twentieth century.[2] Cassirer, a neo-Kantian, traced modern philosophy – for him identical with the philosophy of Kant – back to Nicholas of Cusa (1401–64) on the grounds that it was Cusanus who first foregrounded the problem of knowledge and who understood the proper role of mathematics in analyzing nature. Cassirer discussed a variety of other figures such as Francesco Petrarca, Marsilio Ficino, Pietro Pomponazzi, and Galileo and tried to make some generalizations about trends in Renaissance ideas about freedom and necessity and the subject–object problem. But Cassirer was working with relatively few data points and a number of anachronistic categories, and there is little in his analysis that would satisfy specialists today. Recent scholarship has focused instead on the three broad traditions of philosophical writing alluded to above: humanism, scholasticism and the "new philosophies."



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Humanism, originally a movement in north Italian city-states to revive Roman literature, was refashioned by Francesco Petrarca into a distinct form of culture, challenging the hegemony of scholasticism, which he regarded as dogmatic, excessively technical, useless, impious, and (worst of all) French. Petrarch proposed instead that the study of ancient Roman literature would lead to the moral renewal of Italian society and the return of Roman greatness. Humanists would address all educated persons and would spread virtue, eloquence and love of country. Humane studies would embrace all ancient philosophers, not just Aristotle. As humanism became an established educational tradition in the fifteenth century, Petrarca's vision was gradually realized. Humanists searched for, edited and translated the works of neglected and unknown ancient philosophers, including Platonists, Epicureans, and Stoics, and even encouraged the study of non-Christian religions such as Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism as well as the "ancient theologies" of Hermeticism, Orphism, and Zoroastrianism.[3] They proposed humanistic reforms of other educational traditions, so that one can speak of humanistic medicine, humanist logic, humanistic law, and humanistic theologies; even the Aristotelian philosophy of the schools was affected. The hallmarks of humanist reform were always accurate study of texts in the original languages, preference for ancient authors and commentators over medieval ones, and avoidance of technical language in the interests of moral suasion and accessibility.

The success of the humanists did not by any means signal decadence in the world of scholastic philosophy. In Italy, especially at the universities of Padua and Bologna, it might even be said that scholasticism was enjoying a second golden age. Italy developed its own tradition of university philosophy, sometimes misleadingly referred to as the "School of Padua" or "Averroism," which flourished between the time of Paul of Venice and Pietro Pomponazzi and for long afterwards. In addition to developing a range of distinctive and subtle positions in logic, metaphysics, natural philosophy and psychology, Italian scholastics responded to the challenge of humanism by seeking out more correct texts and translations and by reviving the study of the Greek commentators on Aristotle. But they did not usually share the sweeping prejudice of the humanists against the "medieval" or their hostility to technical language. Italian scholastics in fact continued or revived the study of their medieval predecessors, so that one can find lively Renaissance traditions of Albertism, Thomism, Scotism, and nominalism. The other great scholastic tradition of the Renaissance, that radiating from the Iberian and Hispanic worlds in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, also continued to find inspiration in medieval scholastic traditions, particularly Thomism. And it too developed its own distinctive metaphysical and



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ethical positions, particularly in response to the Spanish conquests in the New World, which raised issues about the morality of empire, conquest and slavery. Hispanic scholastic philosophers ultimately helped found new forms of international law which emerged in the seventeenth century with the burgeoning of the European overseas empires.

Even though by any objective standards scholastic philosophy was still creative and responsive to new cultural influences during the Renaissance, many philosophers of the time found the categories, intellectual habits, and interests of school Aristotelianism too confining; some, indeed, denounced it as dry, morally empty, or pernicious to true piety. So the Renaissance saw a number of "new" philosophies – "new" in the sense of "non-Aristotelian" – which went beyond the eclectic moralism of the humanists and challenged the scholastics on their own ground. These philosophies constituted full-fledged alternatives to current Aristotelian philosophies, and usually sought inspiration in other ancient philosophical systems, principally Platonism. The first of the new philosophies (though "new theology" might be a more correct term) was elaborated by Nicholas of Cusa, who, though continuing the traditions of Dionysian and Proclan Platonism descending from the Rhenish students of Albert the Great, deserves the title of the first "new philosopher" of the Renaissance for reasons discussed by Dermot Moran in chapter 9.[4] Other new philosophers include Ficino (who revived Neoplatonism), Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (who based his new universal theology on Cabala and other esoteric philosophies), Francesco Giorgi, Agostino Steuco, Giambattista della Porta, Francesco Patrizi, Giordano Bruno, Tommaso Campanella, and Pierre Gassendi. All of these men drew on neglected ancient philosophies to propose comprehensive alternatives to Aristotelianism. In this group of philosophers – it would be too strong to call it a tradition – one finds an effort to propose new philosophies of language, new natural logics, new physical theories, new cosmologies, psychologies, and politics as well as new philosophical vocabularies. In this group one also finds the most incautious challengers of Christian orthodoxy. Of the ten figures just mentioned, the Inquisition investigated four, tortured and imprisoned another, and burned a fifth at the stake; the works of all but Cusanus and Steuco were on the *Index of Prohibited Books* at one time or another. Finally, it is this group of thinkers that most clearly reveals, above all through their interest in magic, the desire for power over nature that is characteristic of the Renaissance as a whole and a precondition for the emergence of applied science and technology in the early modern period.[5]

The fractiousness and pluralism of the philosophical enterprise in the Renaissance raised in acute form a question that concerns philosophers in all periods: just what is philosophy, and what should it be? Should it be



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what it often was in antiquity, a cult-like group of disciples following the teachings of a master, seeking an esoteric, transformative view of reality distinct from that of the society around them, providing them with godlike tranquillity or a sense of moral worth? Or should it be merely a form of culture, part of the education of the orator–statesman, outfitting him with topics and arguments, as Cicero preferred? Or should it be what it became in the Middle Ages, a faculty in a university, preparatory to the study of theology, medicine, and law? Some philosophy masters rejected this humble role already in the Middle Ages, and were accused by the theologians of wanting to make philosophy the rival rather than the handmaid of theology. By the fourteenth century some scholastics evidently believed that philosophy should declare its independence from "higher" studies, even from religion, and become an autonomous branch of knowledge, offering a kind of happiness distinct from religious beatitude.[6] Such claims naturally drew criticism, above all from humanists. Humanists wanted philosophers to give up their pretensions to a theoretical wisdom above the reach of human reason and confine themselves to the modest task of moral formation. But they in their turn were vociferously contradicted by the new philosophers, the Platonists and *Naturphilosophen*, who believed that philosophy should teach an esoteric wisdom or constitute a source of secrets about the natural world, an avenue to power over nature, even a way to escape the limits of our humanity and become gods. Others influenced by medieval Arabic thinkers saw philosophy as a master-science, embracing and giving principles to all the sciences; some, like Campanella or Bacon, saw it as a guide to the reform of politics; others, like the skeptics Montaigne, Pierre Charron, or Francisco Sanches, saw it as a form of psychic therapy. Marsilio Ficino and Giambattista della Porta identified the aims of the philosopher with those of the magician.

Given this diversity of outlook, it is no surprise that many subjects considered to belong to philosophy in the Renaissance would no longer be thought philosophical today: most of natural philosophy (which included botany, biology, medicine, physiology, optics, physics and cosmology), magic, demonology, music, astrology, mysticism, theosophy, and theology. Also within the purview of Renaissance philosophers were classical philology, history, literature, politics, poetry, rhetoric, the art of household management, and biblical hermeneutics as well as the sciences of angelology, numerology, and Cabala. Indeed, since in the Renaissance philosophy could still mean learning in general (as Robert Black points out in chapter 2), the list of subjects potentially to be included under philosophy could be extended indefinitely.

Clearly some compromise is called for between the requirements of the modern academy and strict historicism, so philosophy for the purposes of



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the present collection will be understood approximately as it is understood today, as comprising, in other words, the philosophy of language, logic, metaphysics, psychology, religion, politics, and ethics. Even within this narrower field, the present volume does not aim to provide "coverage" of all major themes and figures, which is hardly possible in a volume this size, and hardly necessary given the existence of the *Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, the *Routledge History of Philosophy* and the excellent textbook *Renaissance Philosophy* by Charles Schmitt and Brian Copenhaver, to say nothing of works in other languages. The goal here is rather to provide a guide to the most distinctive themes and important contributions of Renaissance philosophy, especially those that have been discussed in recent scholarly literature, and to sketch in the most important cultural developments that affected what philosophers wrote and how they wrote it. It is intended primarily to serve philosophers and intellectual historians as well as students of the Renaissance interested in the ways that the art, literature, music, religion, and politics of the period reflect and are reflected in its philosophical life.

The plan of this volume emphasizes the dynamism and pluralism of Renaissance philosophy, its search for new philosophical perspectives as well as its transformation and radicalization of scholastic traditions inherited from the Middle Ages. The volume falls roughly into two parts. The first part focuses on the various revivals of ancient philosophy as well as the transformation of Aristotelianism and the Arabic philosophical traditions inherited from the Middle Ages. Luca Bianchi describes the continuing dominance of Aristotle in university curricula, the response of scholastic philosophers to the new cultural priorities coming from humanism, and the continual process of adaptation, hybridization, and school formation within the broader Aristotelian tradition. Christopher Celenza tells the story of the Platonic revival as a process of cultural mediation and interpretation, and shows how Platonism created a new kind of philosophical culture with close links to religious devotion, medicine, and the literature of courts. Jill Kraye discusses the humanist revivals of Stoicism, Epicureanism, and skepticism; the new interest in the Hellenistic practice of psychic therapy; and the hermeneutical difficulties faced by scholars and thinkers trying to naturalize Hellenistic philosophy in a Christian culture. Though Arabic philosophy had been studied in Latin Christendom since the twelfth century, Dag Nikolaus Hasse shows that the apogee of Western interest in Arabic philosophy was reached only in the sixteenth century, and he gives some case studies of its influence on Renaissance psychology, natural philosophy, and the theory of religious inspiration. Finally, Brian Copenhaver discusses the question of whether Ficino's revival of ancient magic can be seen as an agent of



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modernization, and shows how magic could provide a new way of reading the Platonic dialogues and a new way of understanding religion as an effect of wider magical and astrological processes.

The second part of the book looks forward towards modern philosophy and dwells on the original contributions of the period in the the philosophy of language, metaphysics, cosmology, psychology, ethics, and politics. The question of modernity is explicitly raised by Dermot Moran who takes a moderate position on the much-discussed issue of the modernity of Cusanus. Lodi Nauta treats the humanist reform of the trivium (grammar, logic, and rhetoric), asking whether one can identify a specifically *philosophical* contribution of humanism in these areas; focusing on the limit case of Lorenzo Valla, he shows how Valla's emphasis on the linguistic basis of all intellectual activity leads to "a new hermeneutics, a new approach to texts, arguments and meaning." Paul Richard Blum gives an account of the major philosophical issue of the High Renaissance, namely the problem of human immortality; he explains the metaphysical, epistemological, and theological aspects of the issue and discusses the continuities between Renaissance and seventeenth-century approaches to the problem. John P. Doyle shows how the much-neglected tradition of Hispanic scholasticism engaged with contemporary moral issues raised by the Spanish conquest of the New World and was an integral part of European philosophical debate in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The rising challenge to the Aristotelian worldview is the subject of Miguel Granada's chapter, which discusses the alternative cosmologies proposed by the four major natural philosophers of late Renaissance Italy: Bernardino Telesio, Francesco Patrizi, Giordano Bruno, and Tommaso Campanella. David Lines describes the rivalry and cross-fertilization between the humanist and scholastic traditions in the teaching of ethics, and gives a summary of the major issues in Renaissance moral thought. Finally, Eric Nelson shows how an under-theorized aspect of the medieval concept of rulership leads to an elaboration of republican theory and a new approach to the problem of political order, while the recovery of the Roman republican tradition complicated Greek ideas of liberty and justice inherited from Aristotle's *Politics*.

In addition to the chapters dealing directly with the work of Renaissance philosophers there are four chapters devoted to the historical setting and conditions of inquiry encountered by Renaissance philosophy. Robert Black describes the way philosophy was studied at different levels of the curricula and in different educational settings, including humanist schools, universities, academies, and courts. James Hankins gives an account of humanism and scholasticism as rival forms of education, each with its own intellectual practices and purposes, and discusses the aims and limitations of humanist



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moral philosophy using Petrarca as a case study. Peter Harrison explains the impact of the sixteenth-century Reformation on philosophy and how it was taught, and shows how Protestantism provided a model for the seventeenth-century reforms of philosophy while promoting voluntarism, corpuscularism, experimentalism, and the demystification of nature; the Reformation promoted, he argues, a new conception of philosophy as a body of doctrines rather than as an avenue of self-transformation. Finally, Ann Blair describes how classifications of the disciplines and the ordering of knowledge and objects changed in response to the information revolution of the Renaissance – the invention of printing – while emphasizing the broad continuity of disciplinary schemes and techniques of information retrieval between the medieval period and the end of the seventeenth century.

## NOTES

1. Sorell 1993, Parkinson 1993, Menn 1998b; Kraye and Stone 2000; French and Wetstein 2002.
2. English translation in Cassirer 1972.
3. For the recovery of ancient philosophical literature in the Renaissance, see Hankins and Palmer 2007.
4. De Libera 1984.
5. The classic study is Yates 1964; see also chapter 8 in this volume.
6. Bianchi 2003.



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# 2

ROBERT BLACK

# The philosopher and Renaissance culture

## Philosophy as an academic discipline in schools and universities

During the Renaissance, the term philosophy could still denote learning in general: thus Gregor Reisch named his encylopedic textbook (published first in 1503 but reprinted extensively in northern Europe as well as in Italy throughout the sixteenth century) *Margarita philosophica*, a work which served as an introductory compendium of learning from the most elementary reading to theology, normally regarded as the pinnacle of knowledge. At the same time, however, Reisch focused on the subjects which had, in the course of the Middle Ages, come to constitute philosophy as an academic discipline: logic, natural philosophy (meaning natural sciences), morals, and metaphysics.

Up to the twelfth century, when Europe witnessed the emergence of specialized institutions of higher education – now known as universities but usually called *studia* or *studia generalia* in the later Middle Ages and the Renaissance – philosophy, as an academic discipline, regularly formed part of a unitary curriculum, beginning with elementary reading and grammar and terminating with theology, all of which was taught within one institution or school. Such schools usually had an ecclesiastical affiliation, often with a monastery or a cathedral. The best of these schools (e.g. at Chartres) embraced a remarkably catholic range of knowledge. William of Conches, for example, a great teacher who taught in the French schools during the first half of the twelfth century, left a series of commentaries reflecting his teaching activity: from grammar (on Priscian, in two different redactions) to moral philosophy, physics, cosmology, metaphysics, and theology (on Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, Macrobius, and Plato's *Timaeus*).

The rise of universities had a revolutionary impact on the institutions and curriculum of learning, not least in Italy. In the new specialized educational system which emerged there at the turn of the thirteenth century, higher



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studies such as law, medicine, philosophy, and theology became the preserve of universities and *studia*, whether secular or conventual. Their counterparts were similarly developing specialized institutions of lower education, both primary and secondary: elementary schools for reading and writing, grammar schools for Latin, and abacus schools for mercantile studies. Corresponding were specialist teachers: *doctores puerorum* for reading and writing, *maestri di abaco* for commercial arithmetic, and *magistri grammatice* for Latin. The horizons of elementary teachers hardly extended further than the most rudimentary knowledge of Latin; the culture of abacus masters was firmly rooted in the vernacular, which was the language of their textbooks and curriculum; Latin was the province of the grammar masters, whose interests and preparation was limited to Latin language, literature, and basic philology.[1]

From the thirteenth century, philosophy was hardly taught at the preuniversity level in Italy. An illuminating contrast emerges in the commentaries on a fundamental philosophical work such as Boethius' *Consolation*, read at school both in medieval France and in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Italy. Earlier in the Middle Ages, Boethius, like other authors, had formed part of a broad, universal curriculum embracing a wide spectrum of subjects; Carolingian commentators such as Remigius of Auxerre had used the text as a jumping-off point to discuss a diverse range of disciplines in considerable depth: grammar, rhetoric, philology, geography, mythology, biblical criticism, all branches of philosophy, science, and theology. In the twelfth century, the breadth of discussion remained but there was even greater interest now in the text as a stimulus for philosophical and scientific discussion, as is clear, for example, from William of Conches's commentary. When the *Consolation* became a fundamental text in Italian grammar schools, the focus of reading changed radically. Even the Boethius commentary by a famous Italian teacher such as Pietro da Muglio – respected friend of Petrarch and Boccaccio, teacher of Salutati and grammar and rhetoric master in Padua and Bologna until his death in 1383 – was entirely philological/grammatical in scope: instead of William's wide-ranging philosophical, scientific, and theological digressions and elaborations, Pietro's interests are mythological, historical, geographical, and occasionally allegorical. There are few citations of philosophical texts and little discussion of philosophical doctrine; on the other hand, anecdotes concerning such figures as Plato, Archimedes, Augustine, or Peter Lombard abound. The treatment of such fundamental philosophical problems as the creation of the universe, the interrelation of the elements, the human and world soul and the eternity of God and matter had formed the heart of William's commentary; Pietro da Muglio, however, demonstrated almost complete indifference to such



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questions, remaining oblivious to the contradictions between Boethius' Neoplatonic thought and Christian orthodox doctrine which had preoccupied medieval commentators such as William. An Italian grammarian such as Giovanni Travesio (b. Cremona *c.* 1348) was eventually exempted from teaching basic grammar to boys and expected to teach Aristotle's *Prior* and *Posterior Analytics*, but when he turned to Boethius' *Consolation* in 1411, he too remained most at ease when dealing with grammatical, literary and philological material: his authorities for treating vexed philosophical and theological questions were the Latin poets Ovid and Virgil. This Boethian snapshot is confirmed by the study of glosses on pre-university literary authors in Florentine manuscript schoolbooks. Simple philology (e.g. paraphrase, grammar, figures, word order, geography, history, mythology, elementary rhetorical analysis) remained pupils' habitual fare. Superficial morals and crude philosophy make an occasional appearance, but invariably such comments are lost in an ocean of philological minutiae.[2]

## Philosophy and the teaching of grammar

The status of philosophy in Renaissance schools north and south of the Alps was influenced by changes in language theory and teaching methods. In the earlier Middle Ages, Latin syntax had been taught by what foreign-language teachers now call "total immersion." Latin was spoken exclusively in the classroom; the texts to be read were all in Latin. Eventually pupils began spontaneously to be able to write in Latin. But grammatical instruction at the school level throughout Europe was revolutionized by developments in linguistic theory and logic occurring in French schools during the twelfth century. A philosophical/scientific approach to language was responsible for the emergence of a comprehensive theory of Latin word order. Logically, the mover comes first, then the motion and finally the destination of the motion. But grammatically this then becomes a formula for word order and, indeed, a convenient pattern for basic sentence structure. Implicit here was the notion of natural or logical sentence order, so that the subject can be defined as the part of the sentence preceding the verb, while the predicate becomes the rest of the sentence. For Italian teachers, this was an easy way to make pupils understand the abstract concepts of subject and predicate: word order allowed the pupil to identify the subject as whatever came in front of the verb. Teachers used northern medieval terminology to indicate the grammatical relations among parts of the sentence: thus a verb can govern one case in front of it and another after it. This then becomes a convenient teaching tool: all the pupil has to know, for example, is that the accusative goes in front of certain impersonal verbs, which are then followed by the genitive. A concept



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of linguistic philosophy became, in the hands of Italian grammar masters, a way of teaching Latin almost by, so to speak, filling in the blanks.[3]

In Italy, these changes in language theory had overwhelmingly practical consequences: they offered a facile and rapid method for teaching Latin syntax. The results in northern Europe were less down-to-earth. French teachers such as Petrus Helias had pioneered the new language theories; they were popularized by French pedagogues such as Alexander of Villedieu and Evrard of Béthune in their popular verse grammars; the innovations were closely identified with the premier seat of higher education in northern Europe: the University of Paris. All this meant that the educational establishment in northern Europe took these developments in language theory more to heart than in Italy, where they were mainly regarded as a convenient and utilitarian teaching tool. Northern teachers – e.g. Martin of Dacia or Michel de Marbais – developed grandiose theories to transform grammar into a demonstrative philosophy, culminating in various treatises on modes of meaning (*modi significandi*): this logical and scientific approach to grammar – generally known as modistic or speculative grammar – became the height of fashion in northern Europe from the later thirteenth to the fifteenth century.

It is not surprising to discover that speculative and modistic theory penetrated the introductory subject of grammar in northern schools too. The great verse grammars by Alexander of Villedieu and Evrard of Béthune, both written at the turn of the thirteenth century, circulated widely both north and south of the Alps, but their use reveals the difference between Italian and transalpine approaches. In Italy, these works served primarily as mines of mnemonic verses, used to help pupils memorize grammar rules and key examples. North of the Alps, on the other hand, the texts were memorized in their entirety and subjected to commentaries impregnated with logical and philosophical terminology and content. Thus, about 1300 Jupiter (the pseudonym of a Dijonais grammar teacher named Jean [de Clacy?]) introduced a new style of commentary on Evrard's *Graecismus*, influenced by the latest fashions in modistic grammatical theory then current in the University of Paris arts faculty; in this connection, he was particularly beholden to Radulphus Brito and Michel de Marbais, two leading contemporary practitioners of speculative grammar.[4]

In the Renaissance period, philosophy thus penetrated school education in northern Europe to an extent inconceivable in Italy, where schools tended to be more utilitarian institutions, hardly touched by philosophy in any form. At the level of higher education, on the other hand, the status of philosophy offered less contrast either side of the Alps. The expansion of learning – often known as the "twelfth-century Renaissance" – had resulted in broader and



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deeper study at every level of the hierarchy of knowledge, not least at the upper stages. No longer could philosophy – any less than law, medicine, and theology – receive adequate treatment in unitary monastic or cathedral schools; the result was the gradual emergence of specialized institutions of higher education in Western Europe. The philosophical disciplines became the core of the emerging arts faculties in the nascent universities from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century.

## The teaching of logic, natural philosophy, metaphysics, and ethics

Logic normally constituted the first step on the road to competence in philosophy (as well as in other related disciplines such as medicine). The key textbook was Peter of Spain's (d. 1277) *Summulae logicales*, the most extensively published manual on logic in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, surviving in more than 300 manuscripts and 150 printed editions; during the fifteenth century, another widely used textbook was the linguistic or terminist *Logica* by Paul of Venice (d. 1429).[5] Their approach was subjected to virulent attacks by Italian humanists for undermining latinity, eloquence, and good morals, as well as for displacing genuine ancient textbooks. Lorenzo Valla (d. 1457) offered an alternative with his *Dialectica*, calling for logic to be reformed according to the principles of rhetoric.[6] This work (as well as other humanist rhetorical treatises on logic) had no impact whatever in Italian universities, but in northern Europe humanist logic was more potent: the Dutch humanist Rudolph Agricola's *De inventione dialectica* (1479) became a widely used introductory textbook north of the Alps, often paired with the traditional compendium of Aristotelian logic by George of Trebizond (*c.* 1440). Particularly influential was Peter Ramus (d. 1572), who rejected the Aristotelian and medieval distinction between rhetoric, with its emphasis on probability based on evidence, and logic, with its focus on certain proof; his *Dialectique* (not an entirely revolutionary work, retaining as it did certain key Aristotelian features such as the syllogism) took Protestant universities by storm in the later sixteenth century, although Ramus had little impact in Catholic universities, where he never supplanted Aristotle. In Italy, humanist influence was significant in another way: during the sixteenth century there was a growing tendency to replace medieval scholastic dialectical manuals with new translations of Aristotle's original logical textbooks into humanist Latin.[7]

Natural philosophy signified science in Renaissance universities, embracing the modern subjects of chemistry, biology, geology, astronomy, physics, and psychology, the latter two gaining in importance at the expense of the rest in the course of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The discipline of natural philosophy was based on the canonical textbooks of Aristotle, most



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importantly his *Physics* and *De anima*, although his *De caelo et mundo* and *De generatione et corruptione* maintained a secondary position late into the period. Important too were medieval reworkings of Aristotle, particularly Latin versions of the Arabic commentaries by Averroes (d. 1198).[8] The major curricular development in Italy was the addition of Aristotle taught on the basis of Greek texts, especially in Padua at the end of the fifteenth century; thereafter late ancient commentators on Aristotle such as Alexander of Aphrodisias (*c.* AD 200), Themistius (fourth century AD), Simplicius and John Philoponus (both sixth century) exerted some influence (a process possibly beginning with Ermolao Barbaro in the 1480s). In the end, eclectic Aristotelianism or Aristotelianisms emerged, combining medieval translations and commentary, new translations and commentaries based on the Greek original, and some late ancient commentators; the emphasis tended to be on exegesis, using a wide variety of sources in order to discover the true Aristotle.[9] There was possibly a less deferential and more critical approach to Aristotle, beginning in Paris and spreading to other parts of transalpine Europe (such as Portugal); it may be no accident that, while Italian universities remained wedded to tradition, the Parisians, by the second half of the seventeenth century, had remodeled the traditional natural philosophy curriculum according to advances made by the New Science.

Metaphysics remained a more conservative university discipline throughout Europe during the Renaissance. Aristotelian metaphysics had tended to be taught either according to the more intellectualist approach of the Thomists or the more voluntarist view of the Scotists and Ockhamists. But from the end of the sixteenth century a pervasive influence was exercised throughout Europe by the *Disputationes metaphysicae* (1597) of the Spanish Jesuit Francisco de Suárez (d. 1617), who aimed to rewrite Aristotelian metaphysics as a series of systematically organized disputations; his was a work that not only inspired further metaphysical textbooks, notably in Protestant Germany, but also established the method of teaching metaphysics for centuries, not just in Catholic but in Protestant universities as well.[10] Suárez' contribution was as much one of consolidation as of innovation, given that most commentaries on Aristotle beginning in the fourteenth century were in the form of disputed questions, sometimes following the order of Aristotle's texts, sometimes the author's own order.

In Renaissance universities, the central text for the study of moral philosophy was Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Italy witnessed a decline in Thomist influence and a rise in humanist impact on the *Ethics*, particularly regarding the base translated text selected for comment. Florence emerged as the leading centre of *Ethics* study in the fifteenth century: here the key figures were the humanist/scholastic Niccolò



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Tignosi, the scholastic Agostino Favaroni, the scholastic/humanist Guglielmo Becchi, the humanist Donato Acciaiuoli and the Byzantine émigré John Argyropoulos. In the sixteenth century, Florentine predominance in *Ethics* commentaries was lost, while the Jesuit Collegio Romano rose as a significant center for the study of Aristotelian moral philosophy. In the period 1500 to 1650, Florence brought to fruition its philological heritage, bequeathed by Angelo Poliziano (d. 1494), in the *Ethics* teaching of Pier Vettori (d. 1585); Padua remained a more traditional centre, where the focus was on didactic method; Bologna was a yet more conservative venue, where the *Ethics* was linked to the logic and natural philosophy curriculum, and where hostility to humanist translations and rejection of the Greek original as a base text were evident; Rome was divided between its two centers in the university and the Jesuit College, and between the attempt to link philosophy and philology, in the former, and a marked tendency, in the latter, to assimilate moral philosophy and theology. It is possible that moral philosophy was taught earlier in northern European universities than in Italy, where commentators on the *Ethics*, taking their lead from Aristotle himself, agreed to a man that moral philosophy required maturity and so placed the subject towards the end of the university philosophy curriculum. A telling exception was Marc-Antoine Muret (d. 1585), a prominent French humanist teaching in Rome in the mid-sixteenth century, who said that adolescents in their mid-teens were ready to study morals. It is possible to speculate that Muret looked upon the philosophy syllabus from the perspective of the northern universities, where philosophy was studied much earlier than in Italy, often (as has already been noted) being brought into the grammar course itself. Another possible contrast during the sixteenth century regarding moral philosophy as taught by northerners and Italians is between the Florentine moral philosophy teaching of Vettori, with an almost exclusively philological focus, and that of Muret, who preserved a balance between philosophy and theology. Muret was thus able to carry on the traditions of Ciceronian/Petrarchan humanism, based as it was on the union of wisdom and eloquence. Vettori, on the other hand, seems to represent the growing specialization of humanism in sixteenth-century Italian universities. Vettori approached the *Ethics* as a professional philologist, and the other prominent sixteenth-century Italian commentators had a similarly specialist approach, if not from the perspective of philology, then from that of theology or didactic method. The broad Ciceronian outlook of Petrarchan humanism seems to have remained vital in northern Europe, on the evidence of Muret, but the example of Vettori and others suggests that in Italy during the later sixteenth century humanism at the university level was dissolving into a number of separate professional academic disciplines.[11]



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## Philosophy in humanist schools, academies, and princely courts

It is sometimes suggested that philosophy was taught in Italian humanist schools. The famous institutions presided over by the likes of Vittorino da Feltre (d. 1446) in Mantua or Guarino Veronese (d. 1460) in Ferrara accepted pupils well into their twenties (e.g. the future humanist, Giorgio Valagusa, who entered Guarino's school at the age of nineteen). It is therefore not surprising to learn that the curriculum of a school such as Vittorino's embraced both logic and natural philosophy, subjects which Italian university students were regularly studying in their late teens and early twenties. However, these subjects would have been taught on the basis of traditional textbooks and traditional methods: there is no evidence that humanist rhetorical logic penetrated Italian education in the fifteenth, much less the sixteenth, century, while natural philosophy was firmly tied to the basic Aristotelian textbooks throughout the Renaissance. It is unlikely too that ethics was seriously taught in humanist schools (despite the advertising of their proprietors, who claimed to turn boys into fully formed moral individuals, ready to lead state and society). There is no evidence that humanist pedagogues taught Aristotelian ethics, a comprehensible omission given the universal consensus in Italy that mature years were a prerequisite for the study of ethics. Moreover, Latin manuscript texts with ostensibly moral philosophical subject matter (e.g. Cicero's shorter ethical treatises such as *De amicitia* or *De senectute*) consistently received philological, rather than moral philosophical, glosses at the school level. The lofty moral pretensions of humanist pedagogues need to be seen as ideological claims – justifying not only their own aspirations to stand at the summit of the hierarchy of learning, but also their pupils' ambitions to guide the populace as civic leaders or princely advisors or indeed as actual princes – rather than as reflecting the realities of what was a highly conservative and traditional elementary, secondary, and even higher educational curriculum.[12]

Philosophy was linked with associations known as academies, inspired by the Academy established in a park and sports-ground northwest of Athens sacred to the hero Academus by Plato as a locality where he could teach his pupils; it became a school or college organized as a corporate body, surviving, perhaps not continuously, until its final dissolution by Justinian in AD 529. In the mid-fifteenth century, the idea was revived simultaneously in Florence, Naples, and Rome. An Academy gathered round the émigré Greek Cardinal Bessarion (d. 1472) in mid-fifteenth-century Rome, informally including some of the most distinguished Greek and Latin scholars resident in or passing through the city. Sometimes this circle had daily



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meetings, which could even follow a pre-ordained program. The philosophical allegiances of the participants were eclectic, ranging from Platonism and Aristotelianism to Scotism and Thomism. Its interests transcended philosophy in a narrow sense, extending to biblical studies and theology, astronomy and mathematics. Philology was a key concern of this group, particularly the editing of texts and the correction of manuscripts. The subsequent Roman Academy, gathered under the leadership of the humanist Pomponio Leto (d. 1498), had interests mainly in Latin philology, literature and archeology. The Neapolitan Academy, led by Giovanni Gioviano Pontano (d. 1503), also had mainly Roman literary interests, although some of Pontano's own writings (especially his dialogues) were concerned with moral philosophy in an eclectic, Ciceronian manner. The Venetian Academy, founded by Aldus Manutius about 1500, was, by contrast, Hellenist in character: Greek was spoken at its meetings and its rules were drawn up in Greek; its aim was to promote the study of Greek literature and the printing of the Greek classics. The fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Roman, Neapolitan and Venetian Academies had, at most, a peripheral concern with philosophy, but an association with interests explicitly devoted to natural philosophy was the Academia Secretorum Naturae, founded at Naples in 1560 under the presidency of Giambattista della Porta (d. 1615), who himself wrote a widely circulated book on natural magic. Later scientific academies included the Roman Accademia dei Lincei (founded in 1603) and the Florentine Accademia del Cimento (established in 1651). Academies spread to France by the second half of the sixteenth century, developing from a poetic movement known as the Pléiade. Jean-Antoine de Baïf's *Académie de poésie et de musique* was established with legal statutes and royal letters patent by Charles IX in 1570. It continued during the reign of Henri III, producing an offshoot known as the Palace Academy. These academies were concerned with music in the sense of the entire range of knowledge, and so it is not surprising to discover that they had natural and moral philosophical, as well as musical and poetic, interests. The earlier seventeenth century saw various other academies or proto-academies conceived or established in England, Germany, and Russia.[13]

Special consideration is due to the Florentine "Platonic Academy," often regarded as an institution particularly dedicated to the study of philosophy, especially the Platonic variety. One text has figured prominently in discussions of the Florentine Platonic Academy.

> Most vivid is the testimony of a dialogue written by the obscure humanist Benedetto Colucci and dedicated to Giuliano de' Medici. Indeed, this text constitutes the only vivid description we possess of the activities of a group identified as Ficino's academy (not, needless to say, his "Platonic academy").



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> Colucci, an old school friend of Ficino's, later a grammar teacher in Colle and Florence, was well acquainted with Ficino and in a good position to know the habits of his circle; Ficino himself recommended the *Declamationes* to Giuliano's notice. The *Declamationes* depict the activities of Ficino's academy during three days around Christmas of 1474. The scene of the action is, significantly, referred to twice as Ficino's "gymnasium." During the three days, five noble Florentine youths ("quinque praestantes ex nobilitate huius inclitae civitatis iuvenes"), who were all apparently attending Lantino's lectures in the city, deliver practice orations (*declamationes*) in which they encourage the princes of Italy to take up arms against the Turk. Ficino, who is referred to once as "tamquam Academiae princeps" and again simply as "Academiae princeps," is clearly the mentor of the five youths (whom he calls "academici"): it is Ficino who, fifteen days earlier, had allotted to each the task of delivering his oration; it is he who commends the youths after their performance and who sets the order of delivery. As in ancient Greek gymnasia and in the Roman rhetorical schools, there are also present a number of older men and distinguished spectators who watch and comment informally on the performances. These include the poets Naldo Naldi, Alessandro Braccesi, and Poliziano, as well as Lorenzo de' Medici's secretary Niccolò Michellozzi.[14]

Hankins goes on to say that it is not "entirely clear what meaning we should assign to the word 'academy,' but a number of parallel texts suggest that the closest equivalent to *academia* in Ficino's usage is *gymnasium*, as indeed is already suggested by Colucci's alternate use of *academia* and *gymnasium* to describe the scene of the *Declamationes*."[15] He concludes by stating, with reference to Colucci's *Declamationes*, that "the most detailed portrait we have of Ficino's gymnasium shows it engaged in rhetorical practice on a subject having nothing to do with Platonism."[16]

Hankins' interpretation that the *Declamationes* depict Ficino's school of rhetoric has not met with universal acceptance:

> there is more to these speeches than Hankins indicates. First, the assembled students giving the orations are identified as students of Cristoforo Landino ("clarissimus vates vesterque sanctissimus praeceptor"); hence it is not really Ficino's *academia* at all, but an extraordinary gathering at Ficino's school, whether at Careggi or in Florence, of others from the Florentine Studio. Secondly, Ficino is presiding over this group not as the master of his school of rhetoric but as a philosopher. At the very beginning Colucci describes Ficino, *philosophus gravissimus*, as follows: "in tali viro magna autoritas sit, apud eos praecipue qui vere philosophiam sectantur." And after the first speech, all are described as immobilized by grief (recent Turkish conquests being an occasion for lamentation); Ficino, however, "graviore nos teneri dolore sensit, quam eos qui philosophiam profitentur deceat." Indeed Ficino is here no master of rhetoric but a spiritual leader in Platonic philosophy.[17]



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The point at issue, therefore, is whether these *Declamationes*[18] depict Ficino's school ("gymnasium") or his philosophical academy: that is, the gathering of a group devoted to the study of philosophy.

Further examination suggests that both these interpretations are revealing, and that, in fact, the text portrays the simultaneous gatherings of two distinct groups: Ficino's rhetoric school and his philosophical academy. Ficino appears throughout as the organizer of these declamations. In contrast, the Academy here is revealed, not as the pupils, but as the group constituted by Ficino and other members, *socii* (Naldi, Braccesi, Michelozzi, Poliziano), a kind of association over which he presides as *princeps*. The Academy also includes Colucci, who addresses Ficino as *princeps* (president) and the other academicians as fellow members (*socii*). That the Academy is not the same as Ficino's pupils is clear when he turns from addressing the pupils (pp. 46–7) to addressing the Academicians.[19] Ficino is still addressing the Academicians when he refers to "Landinus clarissimus vates vesterque sanctissimus praeceptor": so Landino (who is not even present) is or was, in this context, the teacher (presumably at the Studio) of the Academicians, not of the young orators.[20] The Academy here (in Colucci's usage) is not a school, but is Ficino's group which has been gathered in his school (*gymnasium*) to hear the oratorical performances of Ficino's pupils of rhetoric. The youths are not referred to as attending Landino's lectures in the city, and he does not call the youths "academici." The language in reference to the Academy is that of an association: *princeps*, *socii*.[21]

The scene of the *Declamationes* is Christmas Day, 1473, when Naldo Naldi and Alessandro Braccesi together with Niccolò Michelozzi and Angelo Poliziano (the latter two described as companions [*contubernales*] of the work's dedicatee, Giuliano de' Medici), meet Ficino in the latter's *gymnasium*. They are also joined by five noble Florentine youths, who had each been assigned a topic to declaim fifteen days before. First to speak was Giovanni Cavalcanti, when Colucci himself, together with one Mariano da Pistoia, chanced to join the gathering at Ficino's house. The opening of the text supports Hankins' view that Ficino was the rhetoric teacher of these five youths, since he had assigned them the topic for declamation fifteen days before, and since the action took place in his school.[22]

After the opening oration, Ficino is the first to react;[23] he then turns to the members of his group (Michelozzi, Braccesci, Naldi, Poliziano, and Colucci) and reprimands them for failing to control their emotions without appropriate philosophical restraint.[24] In order to restore philosophical calm to the gathering, Ficino takes up his lute and sings.[25] Given the emphasis here on philosophy and philosophical demeanor, it is hard to deny that the purpose of the association formed by Ficino and his four companions (as distinct from the young students) was the pursuit of philosophy.



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The conversation then turns to praise of the Medici[26] and in the end Ficino closes the proceedings as head of the Academy ("Achademiae princeps"), ordering all to reassemble to hear further speeches the next day.[27] Michelozzi concludes the day's discussions, praising the high level of dialogue that day from the interlocutors (Ficino, Poliziano, Naldi, and Michelozzi himself); he is referring to the members of the Academy and not to the young orators here, because only one of these (Giovanni Cavalcanti) has thus far spoken.[28] He ends the day's proceedings by declaring that Ficino commands here,[29] suggesting therefore that all were obliged to return the next day to hear further orations.

The company duly reassembles, as Ficino had ordered, to hear the oration of Bindaccio Ricasoli. The third oration, given by Paolantonio Soderini, follows, and thereafter Ficino suggests a stroll and a resumption of activity the following day.[30] At that third day's gathering, Francesco Berlingueri gives the fourth oration, after which Ficino declares that he wished Francesco's older relative and namesake, who was serving in communal office, had been present to take pride in his young relative's performance. Again Ficino is referred to as the president of the Academicians ("Achademicorum princeps").[31] The final declamation then ensues from Carlo Marsuppini the Younger.

The closing remarks made by Ficino leave no doubt about the status of the two distinct groups participating in Colucci's dialogue. First Ficino addresses his students of rhetoric, exhorting them to fear God, to give appropriate regard to the Christian religion, and to cultivate the Muses, as they had just done so magnificently.[32] Then Ficino makes an interesting comment on the distinction in social position between himself and his fellow academicians, on the one hand, and the potential patrons who would emerge in the persons of his students from the Florentine elite, on the other: he implores the latter not to forget him and, implicitly, his fellow academicians, who come from a lower social order (namely, chancellors, secretaries, teachers) than the youths (all of whom are members of the political office-holding class), just as Scipio Africanus paid due tribute to the poet Ennius.[33] Ficino goes on to urge the youths to place honesty above expediency and even to sacrifice their lives for the common good.[34] He concludes his remarks to the students by reminding them that they and the Academicians have labored to mutual benefit: they had been spurred on to potential immortal actions by the Academicians' encouragement, while through the patronage from elite figures such as these youths, the Academicians' fame will be celebrated by posterity.[35]

Then, crucially for the understanding of this text and of Ficino's Academy, Ficino turns from the students and addresses the Academicians directly in the second person plural, distinguishing them from the students, referred to in the third person. This grammatical distinction makes it certain that the



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Academy with its Academicians and the students of rhetoric are two different groups.[36] Having praised the rhetorical efforts of the students, Ficino now considers the potential contribution of other orators of whose talents Florence could boast, singling out Donato Acciaiuoli, Marco Parenti, Alamanno Rinuccini, Bartolomeo Scala, Cristoforo Landino, Bernardo Nuzzi, and Gentile Becchi.[37] Particularly significant here are the terms in which Ficino refers to Landino. He is still addressing the Academicians when he refers to "Landinus clarissimus vates vesterque sanctissimus praeceptor."[38] So Landino is not (at least in this passage) referred to as the teacher of the young students of rhetoric, but rather of the Academicians Poliziano, Michelozzi, Naldi, and Braccesi.[39] In conclusion, the results of this reexamination of Colucci's *Declamationes* not only highlight Ficino's work as a rhetoric teacher but also reveal his activities as leader of a small study group in Florence dedicated to philosophy, a so-called Academy.

This meager evidence from the pen of Colucci, however, can scarcely vindicate the Platonic Academy of Florence as a significant force in Florentine intellectual life or in the dissemination of Platonism, which in its earlier Florentine manifestations was, by and large, a one-man effort. It is revealing that Landino was not formally part of the older group described by Colucci (his presence might have reinforced its philosophical character). The fact that this is the only evidence for an organized group that Ficino harangued about philosophy (at least about philosophical demeanor if not content) suggests that its existence was fleeting: none of the four members (*socii*) rushed to become philosophers. Ficinian Platonism, in its first decades, lacked a lasting or significant foothold in educational institutions (Ficino's teaching at the university, whether or not Platonic, was ephemeral and insignificant), enjoying only informal support from various amateur Florentine patrons. On the evidence of Colucci's text, Ficino seems to have attempted to launch a little philosophical discussion group, but, like many such informal associations, it seems hardly to have taken off.

Courts too could offer a venue for philosophical discussion. The most famous example in this connection is the dialogue-cum-treatise *Il cortegiano* (1508–28) by Baldassare Castiglione (d. 1529), a work intended to portray the court of Urbino in 1506, regarded by Castiglione as a lost golden age, as well as to depict the upbringing, education, and formation of the ideal courtier, able to win the favor of a prince and so to bring about the well-being and recovery of Italy, torn by internal and external strife. Castiglione's view was that none of the courtier's achievements, whether as soldier, writer, sportsman, musician, or conversationalist, should be lacking in *sprezzatura*, a spontaneous ease of accomplishment combined with a nonchalent superiority that became the hallmark of the true gentleman for centuries thereafter. This



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notion of *sprezzatura* was derived, via the humanists, from the moral philosophical teachings of Aristotle and Cicero, who had portrayed the comportment of the ideal and well rounded citizen. *Il cortegiano* also contained a famous treatment of Platonic love, based on Plato's *Symposium* as reinterpreted by the Florentine Platonists, as well as a debate about the best constitution, based on Aristotle. Castiglione's work served to popularize the ideas of humanist moral and Platonic philosophy not only in Italy but throughout Europe with its translations into English, French, Spanish, and Latin.[40]

## The transmission of philosophical thought

In the Middle Ages, the principal media for philosophical discussion had been formal and abstract treatises (often in the form of disputations putting one side of a question, then the other, and ending with a definite conclusion by the author) or commentaries on texts, usually by an ancient authority such as Aristotle. In the Renaissance, these forms of philosophical discourse continued and thrived, but another genre came into fashion too. Philosophical dialogues had been composed in the Middle Ages (e.g. William of Conches's *Dragmaticon philosophiae*), but these were abstract works, lacking verisimilitude or a flavor of genuinely spontaneous conversation. Such abstract dialogues continued to be written in the Renaissance (a famous example is Petrarch's *Secretum*, where the interlocutors are simply identified as Franciscus and Augustinus, presumably Petrarch himself and his favorite author St. Augustine). Beginning in the fifteenth century, however, realistic dialogues, modeled on works such as Cicero's *De oratore*, came into vogue. These humanist, neo-Ciceronian dialogues aimed to depict credible conversations in realistic settings. Like genuine conversations, humanist dialogues often lacked clear-cut conclusions (unlike scholastic disputations).[41] Scholars today still debate the genuine authorial voice in moral philosophical dialogues such as Poggio Bracciolini's *De avaritia* (1429) or Lorenzo Valla's *De vero bono* (1432). Almost all dialogues were modeled on Cicero's conversational dialogues, where authorities exchange views in extended speeches, rather than on the Socratic dialogues of Plato, with their rapid give and take and their careful cross-examination of hypotheses; a rare exception is the little-known *De comparatione reipublicae et regis* (*c.* 1490) by Aurelio Lippi Brandolini.[42]

In the Renaissance, the greatest technological change affecting the dissemination of philosophical ideas and texts was, of course, printing. Texts and ideas had circulated rapidly in the Middle Ages too, especially with the emergence of the universities and the development of the so-called *pecia* (piece) and *reportatio* systems: the former was an organized and controlled method of copying works section by section, while the latter involved groups



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of students informally reproducing texts read by masters. Such methods ensured the rapid dissemination of works such as Aquinas' commentaries on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* or *Ethics*; indeed, such procedures persisted into the Renaissance, several philosophical texts surviving today in *reportatio* copies – for example, the writings of Pietro Pomponazzi (d. 1525). Printing obviously facilitated the even more rapid circulation of texts, but it had other results too. Scholars and students now had standardized and uniform versions of texts available, thus facilitating discussion, dialogue, and debate over long distances. New philosophical schools and approaches could be quickly disseminated: there is little doubt that the rapid success and impact of the Platonic revival – hardly touching institutions of formal education such as universities – were due to the press; the magisterial voice was no longer the only or even principal medium for spreading new philosophical texts and ideas. The Greek revival too was given a special boost by printing: the lack of skilled Greek copyists meant that Greek texts had spread slowly in the West during the fifteenth century, but once a leading printer such as Aldus took on Greek publishing in a serious way, versions of Greek philosophy in the original language were quickly disseminated throughout Europe.[43]

Context – institutions, social customs, technological innovations – can shed abundant light on philosophical developments, but it can never tell the whole story. Many of the greatest Renaissance philosophers had limited support from contemporary society or institutions. Ficino taught perhaps only for one year at a university; Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (d. 1494) was refused an institutional venue for his proposed disputation on the renowned 900 theses; Giordano Bruno was burnt at the stake by the Inquisition in 1600 for his heretical teachings; Tommaso Campanella (d. 1639) was censured, tortured, and repeatedly imprisoned for his heresies; the public lectures of Galileo Galilei (d. 1642) covered the traditional Aristotelian natural philosophical syllabus: his innovatory physics was disseminated through his extensive private lessons. Indeed, the most famous Renaissance political philosopher – Niccolò Machiavelli – composed his treatise *De principatibus* (*The Prince*) – arguably the most original piece of political theory ever written – as an outcast from his native Florence, denied the patronage of the dominant Medici and even the support of close friends such as the Florentine aristocrat Francesco Vettori. The Renaissance was an age of famous patrons, but, in philosophy, genius counted the most.

## NOTES

1. De Ridder-Symeons 1992–6; Black 2001; Grendler 2002.
2. Black and Pomaro 2000; Black 2001, 275–300, esp. 304–7.
3. Percival 2004.



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4. Grondeux 2000.
5. Peter of Spain 1972; Paul of Venice 1472.
6. See below, chapter 10.
7. Schmitt *et al.* 1988, chs. 6 and 7.
8. See below, chapter 7.
9. Schmitt 1983a and below, chapter 4.
10. See below, chapter 13.
11. Lines 2002a and below, chapter 16.
12. Grafton and Jardine 1986; Black 2001.
13. Lowry 1979; Yates 1947; Bentley 1987; Kidwell 1991.
14. Hankins 1991, 445; see also Hankins 1990b, Hankins 1994, and Hankins 2002a, all reprinted in Hankins 2003–4, II: 187–218, 219–72, 273–316, and 351–95.
15. Ibid., 446.
16. Ibid., 458.
17. Field 2002, 365; Hankins' reply is in Hankins 2002a.
18. Colucci 1939. The date of the action of the *Declamationes* is 25, 26, 27 December 1473, not 1474; the date of their redaction by Colucci is between February and September 1474. Cf. ibid., x–xiii.
19. Ibid., 47: "Vos autem Achademici animadvertistis, quanta arte haec iuventus usa sit . . ."
20. There is no doubt, philologically, that Ficino is here addressing the Academicians, not the youths: subsequently, the latter are referred to only in the third person ("His optimi adolescentes"); the rest of those present are referred to in the first person plural when Ficino is included ("imitemur et aemulemur," "prosequamur"), and in the second person when Ficino is addressing the other Academicians ("vester"). The last use of the second person plural had been applied to the Academicians and so here it must also refer to them.
21. Colucci seems here to be using the term "socius" to translate the vernacular "socio" (member) rather than in its strict classical Latin sense of friend or comrade; otherwise, its pairing with "princeps" would jar.
22. Ibid., 3.
23. Ibid., 14.
24. Ibid., 14–15: "Sed ubi Ficinus graviore nos teneri dolore sensit, quam eos qui philosophiam profitentur deceat, seque etiam aegerrimum sublevandum censeret, subridens, ut sibi mos est, nos aspexit: Catenas, inquit, barbaras cervicibus nostris iam impositas esse arbitramini."
25. Ibid., 15.
26. Ibid., 15–19.
27. Ibid., 19.
28. Ibid., 19: "Tum Michelotius ad nos conversus: Videte, inquit, de magnis quid sit viris orationem habere."
29. Ibid., 19.
30. Ibid., 32.
31. Ibid., 39.
32. Ibid., 46: "Postquam tribus diebus quinque praesantes iuvenes declamationes suas habuere, Marsilius omnes pro contione laudavit sicque eos est exhortatus. Virtus, o generosi iuvenes, cum aetate crescat. Timete immortalem omnium



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rerum Auctorem, eiusque sancta religio primum semper apud vos locum teneat. Defendite patriam et civibus de re publica bene sentientibus sine invidia favete, nostras colite perpetuo Musas, ut magnifice fecistis."

33. Ibid.: "Nos humili loco natos non dedignemini. Nam P. Scipio Africanus qui solus omnibus praestabat, Ennium vatem magis fide quam sapientia pollentem in sepulchro suo condi voluit."
34. Ibid.: "Honestatem utilitati praeponendam et pro communi salute animam effundendam esse censeatis."
35. Ibid., 46–7. In this passage Ficino uses the first person plural to indicate the Academicians, including himself, and the second person plural, first to address the youths, and second to address the other Academicians present: see n. 20 above.
36. Ibid., 47: "Vos autem Achademici animadvertistis, quanta arte haec iuventus usa sit, quae nostros principes summis extulit laudibus ut sanctissimum suaderet inceptum. De gloria profecto eorum et immortalitate agitur. Utinam sapiant quod votis et oratione hortamur! Hi optimi adolescentes pietatis officio satisfecisse videntur."
37. Ibid., 47.
38. See n. 20 above.
39. The age range of the Academicians and Landino makes sense here. Landino was born in 1424 and began teaching in 1458, while Naldi (b. *c.* 1435), Braccesi (b. 1445), Poliziano (b. 1454) and Michelozzi (b. 1447) all came from the subsequent generation. Poliziano is documented as Landino's pupil, and Landino was a commanding magisterial presence for Braccesi and his circle.
40. Hankins 2002b.
41. Marsh 1980.
42. Hankins 1996.
43. Richardson 1999.



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# 3

JAMES HANKINS

# Humanism, scholasticism, and Renaissance philosophy

> Another species of *mitigated* scepticism, which may be of advantage to mankind . . . is the limitation of our enquiries to such subjects as are best adapted to the narrow capacity of human understanding . . . A correct *Judgment* . . . avoid[s] all distant and high enquiries, confines itself to common life, and to such objects as fall under daily practice and experience, leaving the more sublime topics to the embellishment of poets and orators, or to the arts of priests and politicians.
>
> (David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, XII)

## Humanism as a form of culture

It is apt to be forgotten by students of the Renaissance that the abstract noun "humanism," with its cognates in Latin and the modern languages, is not attested for the period of the Renaissance itself, but began to be widely used only in the early nineteenth century. It was in the latter period, under the influence of Hegel, that the modern addiction to reifying ideologies and social trends using nouns formed from *-ismos*, the Greek suffix indicating nouns of action or process, began to take hold. *Humanismus*, *humanisme*, and *umanesimo*, the German, French, and Italian forms of the word respectively, eventually embraced two broad families of meaning. The first family understood humanism in the sense of classical education: the study of ancient literature in the original languages. It was in this sense that Georg Voigt in his seminal work, *Die Wiederbelebung des classischen Altertums oder das erste Jahrhundert des Humanismus* (1859), retrofitted the word to signify the Renaissance movement to revive classical studies. In Italy the word *umanesimo* broadened its meaning somewhat to include Italy's literary production in the Latin language from Petrarca to Pietro Bembo. The other family of senses for "humanism" understood the word to signify a certain philosophical outlook. Humanism in this sense reduced the divine to the human, was opposed to any sort of religious dogma or revelation, and based philosophical reflection on a conception of the human being as a purely biological



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entity formed as the result of an evolutionary process, without an immaterial spiritual nature. This philosophical sense of humanism begins essentially with the "humanistic realism" of Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–72), but later included Marxist humanism (Antonio Gramsci), existentialist humanism (Jean-Paul Sartre), humanist pragmatism (F. C. S. Schiller, following William James), ethical humanism (Irving Babbitt), as well as the odd brew of Enlightenment rationalism, utilitarianism, scientific positivism, evolutionary biology, and pragmatism concocted by the American Humanist Association. In twentieth-century scholarship on Renaissance humanism a great deal of confusion was caused by mixing up these two broad meanings of humanism. Thus a "humanist philosophy of man" was imposed upon Latin writers from Petrarca to Castiglione by means of selective quotation, hermeneutical *forzatura*, and by adding professional philosophers like Marsilio Ficino and even Pietro Pompanazzi to the ranks of "humanists." The confusion of terminology has now largely subsided, at least in the Anglo-Saxon academic universe, thanks to the influence of the great Renaissance scholar P. O. Kristeller (1905–99). Kristeller argued cogently and with immense learning that the humanism of the Renaissance could not be construed as a "philosophy of man" but was rather best seen as a movement, rooted in the medieval rhetorical tradition, to revive the language and literature of classical antiquity. Humanists were not philosophers, but men and women of letters.[1]

Though the term "humanism" can trace its origins only back to the nineteenth century, the term "humanist" is attested in Latin and Italian (*humanista*, *umanista*) as early as the second half of the fifteenth century, where it refers to university teachers of humanities lecturing on the ancient authors.[2] By that date, the sort of literary figures called "humanists" in modern Renaissance scholarship had been around for more than a century, most commonly referred to by their contemporaries as *literati, poetae*, or *oratores*. Such figures discharged several professional roles in Italian society. Chiefly they served as teachers of the classics in schools and universities, political secretaries and chancellors, court poets, diplomats and bureaucrats – language specialists in other words. The language they specialized in was Latin. Latin was still the most important medium of communication in the Church and the university as well as in international diplomatic, legal, scientific and scholarly exchange; it was the most prestigious language of record-keeping and memorials of all kinds, especially in the case of records and memorials meant to last far into the future. In addition to professional humanists there were many amateurs, generally members of social and political elites, who had enjoyed a humanistic education and formed an audience for the writings and oratory of contemporary humanists as well as



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for Graeco-Roman literature. Such amateurs were interested in improving their own knowledge and powers of communication and wanted to acquire the social prestige that had begun to accrue to persons with literary accomplishments. The center of the humanists' interests, both as professionals and amateurs, was traditional language arts such as grammar and rhetoric as well as the literary genres of history and biography, lyric and epic poetry, comedy and tragedy, letters, orations, novels, moral treatises and dialogues, and antiquarian studies of all kinds. Most of these genres had been relatively neglected in the medieval period, especially in Italy. The humanists tried to write their own literary works in a new kind of Latin, consciously distinguished from medieval Latin, that aimed to revive the precision, eloquence, and beauty they attributed to the ancient authors.

In other words, the Italian humanists of the Renaissance created a new form of culture, inspired by Graeco-Roman literature, which they referred to with names like the *studia humanitatis* (the humanities), *studia humaniora* (more humane studies), *studia honestarum artium* (the study of honorable arts), *bonae litterae* (good letters), *bonae artes* (the good arts), *eruditio legitima et ingenua* (noble and legitimate learning). This culture occupied a middle ground between purely practical studies such as law, medicine, or the mechanical arts on the one hand, and purely theoretical studies such as natural philosophy, advanced logical theory, metaphysics, and theology on the other. The scope of humane studies was to improve the quality of human beings *qua* human. The humanists claimed that study of good letters made people better, more virtuous, wiser, and more eloquent. It made them worthy to exercise power and made them better citizens and subjects when not exercising power. Humane studies embellished life, brought pleasure, and nourished piety. The humanities did not save souls, but living a good life would bring men favor in the eyes of God and strengthen piety, or at least not damage it. The fundamental assumption of all humanists, as of the Renaissance movement in general, was that the remains of classical antiquity constituted a great reservoir of excellence – literary, intellectual, artistic, and moral – to which debased and decadent modern times could turn in order to repair the damage wrought by the barbaric and corrupt *medium aevum* that had followed the fall of the Roman Empire.[3]

## The culture of scholasticism

To understand the significance of these claims for Renaissance philosophy, and especially for the questions of just what philosophy was and ought to accomplish, it is necessary to grasp the ways in which this new Renaissance form of elite culture differed from its chief rival, namely the scholastic culture



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that had dominated European universities since their founding in the late twelfth and early thirteenth century.

Scholasticism as a form of education and intellectual discipline in fact predates the founding of universities by almost a century.[4] In the twelfth century, a period when the economy and society of Western Europe was increasing rapidly in size and complexity, new forms of political order – ecclesiastical, princely, and communal – were emerging and elaborating systems of law and administration. These required a new kind of official, trained in the application of written authorities and in methods of dispute resolution. The chief ideological resources for the new political order were provided by the jurisprudence of the old Roman Empire and the doctrinal and disciplinary norms established by the Roman Church. The new modes of argumentation were derived primarily from the logical writings of Aristotle, whose complete *Organon* was available by the middle of the twelfth century. The reorganization of traditional authorities into legal codes and textbooks, combined with the logical technique of reconciling apparently incompatible authorities with each other, was at the heart of the new scholastic method. Debate too was central to scholastic method: students were taught to identify significant problems and find solutions to them that could resist refutation and bear up under the weight of critical scrutiny. The goal of the new education, as a great modern authority on canon law put it, was to create "harmony from dissonance": to use the disparate authorities inherited from the past as a normative foundation for systematic sciences of law, theology, and medicine. These sciences could then be used to bring order to state and society.[5]

From the time of Peter Abelard (1079–1142) onwards schools teaching the new intellectual skills flourished in the environs of government and administrative centers such as Paris, Oxford, and Bologna. These informal and lightly regulated schools, normally under the headship of one or two masters and their assistants, multiplied rapidly and were eventually organized by papal and royal authorities into self-regulating corporations. This occurred roughly between 1190 and 1230 – not, coincidentally, a period of crackdown on heresy and deviant behavior of all kinds.[6] The new corporations of masters and students, known as *studia generalia* or universities, were allowed to govern themselves, under the mostly nominal authority of a bishop, in return for an undertaking that licentious behavior by students and dangerous speculation by masters – what we would call "intellectual freedom" – would be reined in.[7] Thought-control was indeed the chief aim of the new corporations, at least initially. The university made sure that every matriculating student was placed under a master who would be responsible for his "life and science," his good behavior and attendance at prescribed



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lectures. Moral control was also exercised by colleges and the "nations," societies of foreign students organized by nationality. All masters had to be licensed to teach by their faculties. Curricula listing set texts were laid down by the relevant faculties and private reading of other texts was prohibited. All reading had to be conducted publicly under a licensed master. Written authorities could be criticized, to be sure, but there was a strong presumption in favor of their truth, and they had to be treated with the utmost respect. The technique of criticizing them usually involved distinguishing at least one sense in which the authority could be said to be correct. It was rare to reject an authority outright, and never done in the case of major Christian authorities. In any case, by the end of the thirteenth century, theological faculties had become largely the preserve of the mendicant orders, whose rigid hierarchical structure was highly responsive to papal authority.

Heresy was still a threat in arts faculties, but the few famous cases of masters punished for heresy should not obscure that fact that the system for the most part functioned effectively to ensure orthodoxy and conformity.[8] The university, together with outside authorities, put in place a structure of incentives guaranteed to bring about a strong tendency to self-censorship. Before the fourteenth century most masters in arts faculties – what we would call undergraduate teachers – were themselves recent graduates in arts. They normally taught for a few years only before seeking more lucrative careers in the Church or in lay administration. Neither was eager to employ heretics. Only a small minority of arts students went on to higher studies in law and theology, where there were even stronger incentives for intellectual conformity. The system of papal and royal provisions to university graduates made the carrot so tasty that the stick was usually unnecessary. The occasional roast of an arts master or an inquisitorial trial enlivened by torture of the defendant was enough to discourage the others.

The scholastic project, the mission of the universities, was thus to bring order to society by a careful sifting of traditional, written authorities, which were then collected and arranged into codes and textbooks and subjected to rational analysis. It is a project analogous in some respects to the imposition of sharia in Islamic societies three centuries before, and may, like much else in medieval Western Christendom, have begun in unacknowledged imitation of what was, at the time, the more powerful and successful religious community. Unlike sharia, however, scholasticism assumed the harmony of natural and divine law and the possibility of applying both to the ordering of society. This gave an opening to the study of pagan philosophy. In the Latin West it was believed that the scientific study of nature, God's handiwork, was a suitable propaedeutic to higher studies in law, medicine,



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and theology. The heavens declared the glory of God, and God's order was revealed in nature as in revelation. Though a pagan, Aristotle was considered the best guide to the rational order behind the natural world. This was an inevitable judgment given Aristotle's role as the most important authority on natural philosophy in the Byzantine and Islamic worlds. Students in arts faculties from the mid-thirteenth century onwards were thus required to hear lectures on Aristotle's "books of nature," the *libri naturales*, as well as on his logic. In this way the logic and natural philosophy of Aristotle became the center of the arts curriculum in medieval and Renaissance universities. In Italy, where in the late thirteenth century medicine became established as a separate faculty alongside canon and civil law, Aristotelian science was regarded as even more vital since it was a necessary preparation for medical study.

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that Aristotle's privileged position in the arts (or undergraduate) curriculum meant that his authority was unquestioned and unquestionable.[9] Long before Petrarca criticized university philosophers for their obsession with Aristotle there were numerous scholastics, especially theologians, who themselves were ready to criticize Aristotle's teaching as inconsistent with Christian truth. There was particular concern about Aristotle's teaching that the world was eternal, not created, and his failure to endorse the doctrine of personal immortality, thus undermining the key doctrine that souls would receive rewards and punishments after death. While the great majority of scholastics believed that Aristotle's educational value far outweighed any potential challenge to Christian orthodoxy, persistent voices were heard throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, often emanating from Franciscan houses of study, calling for Aristotle's educational role to be restricted or his texts to be censored and emended. Peter John Olivi (*c.* 1248–98), a radical Franciscan theologian, went so far as to accuse his fellow theologians of making Aristotle a god, and declared that the Christian reader should read Aristotle "not as a slave, but as a master."[10] It was also possible, though rare, to criticize Aristotle in philosophical terms, by showing, for example, that he reasoned incorrectly from his own principles. Thus Aquinas famously showed that Aristotle's demonstration of the eternity of the world was invalid according to Aristotelian logic, and that a more correct analysis showed that the world's eternity could be neither demonstrated nor disproved.[11]

It is also mistaken to think that Aristotle's role as the backbone of the curriculum in arts faculties meant that medieval thinkers were unfamiliar with other ancient and medieval philosophical traditions. Although they had limited access to Plato's own dialogues,[12] scholastic thinkers, especially theologians, were familiar with the world of Middle Platonism and



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Neoplatonism via (Pseudo) Dionysius the Areopagite, Proclus' *Elements of Theology*, Arab philosophers such as Algazel and Avicenna, as well as ancient Latin accounts of Platonism in authors like Cicero, Seneca, Apuleius, Augustine, and Boethius.[13] The doctrines of the Stoics, especially their moral teachings, were also well known via indirect sources.[14] Academic skepticism was familiar from Cicero and Augustine's *Contra Academicos*. The names and a few key doctrines of the Presocratics and of Socrates himself could be found in Aristotle's reports of their teachings.[15] Yet the great bulk of medieval commentary on ancient philosophy remained focused, understandably, on the Aristotelian school texts. And Aristotle's works proved quite able all by themselves to provoke heated commentary.

## The problem of "Averroism"

The most intractable issue turned out to be how the teacher of Aristotelian philosophy, above all in arts faculties, should conduct himself when the conclusions of philosophy seemed to conflict with the dogmas of Christianity. In the medieval and Renaissance period a certain stigma was still attached to the idea that a master might expound views that he did not himself believe. To do so was regarded by many as immoral, putting the teacher in the despised class of hypocrites, along with actors, members of religious orders who feigned a vocation, and frauds of all kinds. This attitude put pressure on masters to avoid conflicts between Christianity and Aristotelian philosophy, or (like Albert the Great and Aquinas) to minimize the differences between the two, or even (like a number of Franciscans) to argue explicitly against Aristotle and for the Christian position.

These strategies were easier to adopt in theology faculties than in arts faculties, as in the latter case the master of arts was obliged in effect to teach against his own textbook, and in so doing to undermine his own authority as well. Thus from the later thirteenth century onwards it was not uncommon in arts faculties to find masters who sought other ways to adjust the claims of reason and faith. Though all masters ultimately had to defer to religious revelation and authority, some masters urged acceptance of the fact that natural reason could lead in directions incompatible with doctrine. The classic position was that adopted by John of Jandun (*c.* 1285/9–1328), usually regarded as a key figure in the transplantation of "Averroism" from northern Europe to Renaissance Italy. John's view was that the methods and principles of philosophy are different from those of theology; human reason necessarily begins from the senses (*ex sensibilibus*) and so inevitably reaches conclusions, such as the eternity of the world, that conflict with what is known from faith. Theology is based on the "testimony of prophecy"



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(*testimonium prophetiae*) and teaches truths that are "above the senses" (*supra sensus*).[16] John distinguishes repeatedly between what can be learned by philosophy from the senses and what is known from revelation and the saints. He argues that if the truths of faith were demonstrable by philosophy we would derive no merit from belief. He even maintains that theologians harm the faith by attempting to use the methods of natural philosophy to demonstrate religious truths; this practice ends in sophistry and ultimately undermines belief. In Jandun's view, religious truths such as the immortality of individual souls, the omnipotence of God, the creation of the world by God, transubstantiation and the resurrection of the body are not demonstrable by philosophical reason and should be accepted on the basis of faith alone.[17]

Jandun's position on faith and reason, adopted by numerous arts masters in Italy in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, was a direct challenge to the *raison d'être* of arts faculties as it had developed in the thirteenth century. Implicitly, it claimed autonomy for the discipline of philosophy. It challenged the Dominicans' idea that philosophy was the handmaid of theology, most famously espoused by the chief theologian of their order, Thomas Aquinas. Since the Dominicans formed in effect a kind of "think-tank" to advise the papacy on questions of orthodoxy, Jandun's was a dangerous position for arts masters to adopt. The view of Jandun and other arts masters, not all of them identifiable as "Averroists," that philosophy had its own form of highest, godlike felicity, distinct from religious beatitude, did not increase confidence in the orthodoxy of the arts faculty as a whole.[18] It is no surprise that Jandun himself was condemned for heresy by John XXII in 1327 (even though the specific doctrines condemned were political rather than philosophical), and that teachers of philosophy in the arts faculties of Italian universities could be condemned sweepingly by outsiders like Petrarca and Marsilio Ficino as "Averroists" and atheists, dispensers of impiety, destroyers of faith.

This raises the issue of just what an "Averroist" was and how to define the concept of Averroism.[19] The evidence admits of no simple answer. Like "humanism," the abstract noun "Averroism" is a modern coinage. But the adjective "Averroist" was certainly used in the Renaissance, usually by opponents of the philosophers in question, men such as the Platonist Ficino or the Scotist Antonio Trombetta.[20] It is open to doubt whether any of those accused of "Averroism" would have accepted the label for themselves. An Averroist is not a philosopher who simply used one of the Arabic philosopher's commentaries on Aristotle, since most scholastic philosophers and theologians did that without bringing their own orthodoxy into question. Nor is an Averroist identifiable as someone who recognized that some of



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Aristotle's conclusions in philosophy were incompatible with Christian doctrine, since any honest reader of Aristotle would have to admit, at the very least, that Aristotle did not believe in creation *ex nihilo*. In fact almost all interpreters of Aristotle admitted this, including inveterate harmonizers such as Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas.[21] Positions that contemporaries at various times and places identified as "Averroist" include the following: (1) Averroes' notorious reading of the *De anima* that sees Aristotle as the champion of the view that there is only one intellect for all mankind (and hence no personal immortality); (2) the belief that the eternity of the world is a necessary conclusion of philosophy; (3) the belief that *viri speculativi* have their own godlike felicity which sets them apart from the rest of mankind; (4) the belief that God, according to Aristotle and philosophy, does not know singulars and thus has no knowledge of men as individual beings; (5) the belief that philosophy is based on reasoning from sense experience and comes to conclusions different from the truths of faith.

The difficulty with defining Averroism is that if we use these criteria to identify particular individuals as "Averroists," exceptions, ambiguities, and qualifications seem to multiply indefinitely. Some figures like Nicoletto Vernia and Agostino Nifo, both arts masters at Padua, took Averroist positions early in their careers, but later moved in more orthodox directions. Others like Gaetano da Thiene and his student John Argyropoulos accepted Averroes' view of Aristotle but thought that philosophical arguments could be mounted for some Christian doctrines that were regarded by other professors purely as matters of faith. Others like Marcantonio Zimara engaged in an internal critique of Averroistic psychology without moving towards a Christian position. Philosophers like Paul of Venice and Alessandro Achillini tried to combine Averroism with Ockhamism, while Biagio of Parma accepted the "Averroist" separation of philosophy and religion but espoused a materialist psychology. Still others, like Pietro Pomponazzi, argued for positions that were incompatible with Christianity but not indebted in any straightforward way to Averroes. Then there were those like Paul of Venice (in his latest period) who maintained that the Averroist unicity thesis and other theses inconsistent with Christian teachings were merely *probabilis* (i.e. arguable), not demonstrable.[22] Finally, there were some masters, even at institutions famous for "Averroism" like the University of Padua, who were bitter opponents of those who taught doctrines incompatible with Christianity.[23]

So it does not seem to be the case that a school of anti-Christian philosophy was taking shape, at Padua or elsewhere, espousing a common set of doctrines derived from Averroes. What was happening from the first half of the fourteenth century onwards was that the intellectual and moral justification for philosophy in a Christian culture was shifting, becoming



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less vital to the survival of the enterprise. As a discipline philosophy was becoming progressively more autonomous, both institutionally and intellectually. Institutionally, it was becoming increasingly common for masters of arts to spend their entire career teaching philosophy and related subjects in faculties of arts and medicine. (It is significant that all medieval and Renaissance philosophers accused of "Averroism," almost without exception, were philosophers in arts faculties.) The personal prestige of some famous philosophers was such that the colleges of masters and citizen boards that hired philosophers were willing to overlook concerns about orthodoxy as irrelevant to the real needs of students. In Italy universities were civic institutions over which religious authorities had little real power, and career paths in medicine and civil law were much less responsive to Church incentives than in northern Europe. What counted in hiring professors was the expertise of the man hired and his ability to bring prestige to the university. It helped that the sheer number of universities was increasing exponentially from the later fourteenth century onwards, which meant that the competition for the services of famous professors was intense.[24] Increased personal wealth, fame, institutional security, and independence from ecclesiastical pressure made it easier for philosophers to develop their own positions with greater freedom. Thus during the Renaissance period a wide range of philosophical views found expression, some of them compatible with Christian doctrine, some not. Some arose from renewed study of Averroes, others from the study of new philosophical sources made available by humanists, such as the ancient Greek commentators on Aristotle, others from the new humanist translations of Aristotle.[25] Philosophy was emerging as a secular discipline.

## Petrarch's critique of scholasticism

These tendencies in scholastic education had already taken root when Francesco Petrarca (1304–74) launched his famous critique of scholastic philosophy, the *De sui ipsius et multorum aliorum ignorantia* ("On His Own Ignorance and That of Many Others").[26] Petrarca, traditionally regarded as the "Father of Humanism," was actually the chief figure in the third generation of Italian humanists, as has recently been shown; his real importance to the movement is his discovery of an ideological niche where the new literary studies could survive and flourish, and his powerful critique of alternative forms of culture.[27] In the *De ignorantia* (1367–70), which he called an "invective," Petrarca elaborated what was to become the standard humanist critique of scholastic philosophy.[28] At the time Petrarca was writing, both neo-Roman literary studies and scholastic philosophy were



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considered by some religious authorities to be suspect for impiety and paganizing tendencies,[29] though scholastic philosophy had far greater prestige and institutional backing. Petrarca's invective reflects this situation, for it is as much a defense and justification of humanistic studies as it is an attack on scholastic Aristotelianism. Petrarca was aware that there were forms of scholasticism less threatening to Christianity, and in another invective he had lashed out at scholastic medicine for being a mechanical art concerned with urine and feces.[30] But in the *De ignorantia* he chooses to attack the strain of scholastic Aristotelianism that would later be decried as "Averroist." His targets in particular were three Venetian gentlemen and a famous medical doctor living in Venice, Guido da Bagnolo, all of whom had deep interests in Aristotelian natural philosophy, acquired most probably at the University of Bologna.[31]

Petrarca's critique begins with an attack on the triviality and unreliability of Guido da Bagnolo's intellectual attainments. He is interested in *mirabilia*; he knows

> how many hairs a lion has in its mane, how many feathers a hawk has in its tail, and how many coils an octopus wraps around a castaway. He knows that elephants mate from behind, and are pregnant for two years; and that this docile and vigorous animal, with its near-human intelligence, lives as long as two or three centuries. He knows that the phoenix is burned on an aromatic pyre and is reborn from its ashes; that the sea urchin can halt a vessel launched with great force, but is powerless when taken out of the water; that a hunter can trick a tiger with a mirror; and that an Arimaspean uses a spear to slay the griffin (17).

But, Petrarca notes, these commonplaces of medieval bestiaries turn out to be false, as recent experience of the actual animals disclosed. The rest of the natural philosophical knowledge his opponents boast of is similarly uncertain and fabulous. Much of it is based on the authority of Aristotle. But really, how could Aristotle know such things, "things that obey no reason and cannot be tested experimentally," *cuius et ratio nulla esset et experimentum impossibile* (48)? Following his theme, Petrarca varies a standard anti-Aristotelian topos and declares that "Aristotle was human and could be ignorant."[32] Yet despite his fallibility, his opponents have made Aristotle into a god. Aristotle was a wise man, but hardly a god; his writings, like those of all human authorities, are full of mistakes. Human reason without divine aid is in general weak and fallible, and Petrarca thanks God for granting him a modest intelligence "that is not restless for seeking higher things or curious to investigate things that are difficult to seek out and harmful when found" (56). This is especially true of the most sublime objects of thought: matters such as the immortality of the soul, the nature of God, salvation and the nature of



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true happiness. Aristotle had only a dim understanding of such matters; he was like an owl looking at the sun.[33] Even Plato, the philosopher ancient Christians thought to be closest to Christianity, was not a true philosopher, in the sense of someone who invariably spoke the truth (103).

Plato is Petrarca's prime example of how narrow and blinkered his Aristotelian opponents are. If they knew anything about ancient philosophy and the Church Fathers they would know that Plato was generally considered a more sublime thinker than Aristotle. In their ignorance they assume that doctrines like the eternity of the world and the mortality of the soul are necessary conclusions of reason and philosophy. But if they had studied Plato's *Timaeus* they would see that the greatest of ancient philosophers had argued both for the creation of the world by God and for immortality (87, 97–101). It should be noted that Petrarca's argument here (unlike Ficino's in the next century) is not that Plato should be substituted for Aristotle as the handmaid of Christian theology, but that no one philosopher should be followed in all things, since all philosophers err in some things. To seize upon any single pagan philosopher and follow all his views slavishly is thus a guarantee that one will end up believing false, impious, and heretical doctrines. That explains why, according to Petrarca, his Aristotelian opponents secretly despise the name of Christian and Catholic, why "when there is no threat of punishment and no witnesses they attack truth and piety and in their private dens they secretly mock Christ. They worship Aristotle, whom they don't understand; and they accuse me for not bending my knee before him, ascribing to ignorance what stems from my faith" (87). By inquiring pridefully and curiously into the secrets of nature and the hidden things of God, they have ignored the words of Ecclesiasticus to "seek not what is above you, search not what is beyond your strength"; that is why they bracket the faith in the search for truth. "Isn't this the same as seeking what is true while rejecting the truth?" (89). Philosophical arguments are strong enough to shake religious beliefs, especially when bolstered by pride and arrogance, but they are never strong enough by themselves to compel belief (131–3).

Since philosophy cannot be trusted as a source of truth, there is no point in elaborating systems of thought, no point in seeking a single, coherent philosophical position. This is not to say that philosophy is without value; but its value depends on how it is used. Used rightly, it can be a source of wisdom and inspiration. It can even strengthen faith to read a philosopher like Plato and see that truths of the faith have been defended by great philosophers. But to cling to a single authority when all authorities are unreliable is simply foolish; one is depriving oneself needlessly of other possible sources of wisdom. Quoting Horace (*Epistles*, 1.1.14), Petrarca says that he himself is "not bound to swear by the words of any master" (104). In effect he is arguing that,



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as a Christian, he already has a theological position, which makes a philosophical one strictly unnecessary. His choice of which philosophical opinions to accept is governed by an antecedent commitment to Christianity. His perspective as a Christian already in possession of revealed truth shows him that no philosopher is an adequate guide to that truth. Hence his choice of which philosophers to study, and how to study them, is dictated by a different set of concerns: concern for acquiring general knowledge, eloquence, and virtue.

Petrarca's eclectic approach to philosophy, perhaps not surprisingly, is similar to his approach to literary style and imitation. One reads many great authors to acquire taste and power of expression, but in the end one's style is a sovereign choice, mixing many influences, that expresses one's own distinctive character. In the same way, one reads many great philosophers but becomes a disciple of none; one's philosophical outlook is ultimately a form of self-expression and a "taste in universes." It is a meditation on experience, a personal search for coherence and meaning, not a systematic body of propositions based on true, primary and necessary first principles nor a search for truth. Despite his love of antiquity, Petrarca's view of philosophy is wholly inimical to the ancient idea of the philosophical life, which necessarily involves discipleship, submission to a master, the readiness to engage in long study, and spiritual discipline in the hope of acquiring an esoteric vision of reality not shared by the generality of men.[34] As in the case of Augustine, Petrarca's master is Christ, and the grounds of his belief are ultimately external to the philosophical enterprise.

Petrarca's indifference to the philosophical search for truth is symptomatic of his wider moral vision regarding the purpose of philosophy and literary culture. His other great objection to scholastic Aristotelianism, beyond its triviality, uncertainty, and impiety, is that it is useless and ineffective in achieving the good life, the life of happiness and virtue. Its probing into obscure corners of natural philosophy shows its unconcern with the moral life of human beings. Even when scholastics lecture on Aristotle's *Ethics* – and Petrarca claims to have heard such lectures (107) – they fail to bring about moral improvement. Aristotle's ethical writings are brilliant analytically, but they address only the intellect, not the will.[35] They do not move, they do not persuade, they do not make us better.

> For it is one thing to know, and another to love; one thing to understand, and another to will. I don't deny that [Aristotle] teaches us the nature of virtue. But reading him offers us none of those exhortations, or only a very few, that goad and inflame our minds to love virtue and hate vice ... What good is there in knowing what virtue is, if this knowledge doesn't make us love it? What point is there in knowing vice, if this knowledge doesn't make us shun it?



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> By heaven, if the will is corrupt, an idle and irresolute mind will take the wrong path when it discovers the difficulty of the virtues and the alluring ease of the vices (108).

The contempt of scholastic philosophers for the moral welfare of mankind as a whole is shown by the very language they use: crude, stiff, jargon-ridden, hermetic – a language unconcerned to communicate with and persuade persons outside their narrow sect (*heresis*).

The contrast of will and intellect Petrarca invokes here is of course taken from Augustine, particularly his *Confessions*, which was a key text in Petrarca's own spiritual odyssey.[36] Augustine's account of his conversion presents his journey as a dialectic between will and intellect, between his desire for the true God and his understanding of God's truth. Platonism was Augustine's guide to truth; it removed the purely intellectual obstacles to belief; but conversion only came when his will was converted by God's grace – when he was given a new will to believe. In late medieval thought the issue of whether the will or the intellect was the higher human act became a disputed question in scholastic theology, and it was common for Franciscan theologians and other critics of Aristotelian intellectualism to maintain the superiority of the will to the intellect in terms similar to those used by Petrarca in the *De ignorantia*.[37] But the key point to be grasped is that, in describing how the will may be moved, Petrarca argues, in striking contrast with Augustine, that humane letters and eloquent philosophy can have a subsidiary role in preparing the soul for God's grace. They do this by inculcating virtue. "Although our ultimate goal does not lie in virtue, where the philosophers placed it, yet the straight path toward our goal passes through the virtues, and not through virtues that are merely known, I say, but loved" (110).

Of course Petrarca has no intention of giving humanistic letters a direct role in Christian conversion. His aim is to argue for the superiority of humanism to scholasticism by showing its superior effectiveness in changing the heart. The critique of scholastic Aristotelianism in effect defines by negation what Petrarca considers true culture, the culture of humane studies (*humana studia*). Students of the humanities admit *ex ante* that the highest, theological truths about God, creation, and the soul are to be sought from Christian sources. Implicitly, these truths belong to the *studia divinitatis*, not the *studia humanitatis*.[38] Human studies seek only what is appropriate to the limited human intelligence, situated as it is in its middle rank in the chain of being, between animal and angelic natures. The best human studies can hope to achieve is a modest, limited sort of knowledge: knowledge of the virtues, of how to conduct our life in this world with prudence, decorum, and moral



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excellence. The nature of the virtues themselves is not problematic; the problem is to act with virtue. Humanistic studies, the study of the ancient Roman authors, impart the virtues through eloquence. The great works of Roman literature are written with such power and beauty that they fill us with a love of virtue and a hatred of vice.

> Thus the true moral philosophers and valuable teachers of virtues are those whose first and last purpose is to make their students and readers good. They not only teach the definitions of virtue and vice, haranguing us about virtue's splendor and vice's drabness. They also instill in our breasts both love and zeal for what is good, and hatred and abhorrence of evil (110).

The paradox is that Petrarca, despite his hatred for what has come to be called Averroism or secular Aristotelianism, is here making precisely the same move in the case of humanistic studies that John of Jandun had made in defending the Aristotelian studies of the Parisian faculty of arts.[39] He is trying to create an ideological space for the study of non-Christian literature that neutralizes the demands of Christian belief by stipulating belief in advance. Objectively if not subjectively,[40] he is attacking the model of culture elaborated by Augustine in *On Christian Learning* (*De doctrina christiana*). In the latter work the use of non-Christian sciences and literature is rigidly subordinated to the salvation of the soul and enjoyment of God in the life to come. Pagan learning is only useful insofar as it enables us to understand the Bible. Especially valued are history (including natural history), the mechanical arts, dialectic, and mathematics. Pagan rhetoric is dethroned from its sovereign place in Roman culture and radically reshaped for Christian purposes. The pagan philosophers, especially Plato, and the liberal disciplines can be mined for a few truths compatible with Christianity and useful moral precepts and reduced to compendia; otherwise they are a vanity. By far the greater part of pagan learning is superfluous and potentially pernicious.[41]

Petrarca's model of culture effectively reverses Augustine's, arguing that human life in this world has its own structure of ends and means, and that this structure, though ultimately temporal and finite, is nevertheless not reducible to what is necessary to achieve eternal life. Since the moral life of human beings is autonomous, it demands a form of culture suited to it, a culture that makes us better as human beings in society and in this life, a culture that does not rely on divine grace. Like the "Averroists," Petrarca thus rejects implicitly the unity of truth. He embraces for use in this life human standards of virtue drawn from pagan antiquity, while clinging to Christian faith, hope, and charity to compass his salvation in the next. This means that, as in the case of the "Averroists," the search for truth can go



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on only in a strangely hypothetical and truncated mode. The stance of secular Aristotelians like Jandun is essentially that, if we did not know Christianity taught A and B, reason and philosophy would produce answers C and D. Philosophical alternatives are explored but the results of that exploration must be not be allowed to influence belief. In humanistic studies we can learn what the pagans have to offer up to a point, inspire ourselves with a love of virtue, master the arts of eloquence, acquire deep knowledge of the past. But any embrace of the full spirit of pagan thought and culture is foreclosed from the beginning. The literary scholar, like the philosopher, must become a eunuch before he may enjoy the company of the Muses.

## The humanist conception of philosophy

Whatever the deeper resemblances between Petrarchan humanism and "Averroism" as forms of culture, it is nevertheless clear that the humanist movement called for a radical change in the conception of what philosophy was and what it was for. For humanists philosophy was demoted to the position of one branch of literature among several.[42] The emphasis was placed on moral philosophy, the only part of philosophy deemed useful to human life. Metaphysics, psychology and natural philosophy were neglected when not openly mocked for their obscurity and triviality. Logic was subordinated to rhetoric and reshaped to serve the purposes of persuasion.[43] Ancient moral philosophers were preferred to scholastic contemporaries as presumptively wiser and more eloquent. The dialogic, open-ended exploration of different positions, modeled on Cicero, was preferred to systematic exposition or analysis. The study of philosophy began to include philological study of the text in order to come closer to the philosopher's thought and language. As the goal of humanist philosophy was generalized moral uplift and erudition, eclecticism was the rule, which often accompanied the convenient assumption, derived from Hellenistic philosophy, that all philosophers agreed in substance, differing only in words. Eloquent philosophers like Cicero, Seneca, and Plato were preferred, and Aristotle, whom the humanists claimed was also eloquent in the original Greek, was rescued from the obscure and rebarbative renderings of medieval translators.[44] The idea of a philosophical school, of disciples pursing an alternative life and vision under the guidance of a master, separate from the world around them, was foreign to humanism; even Ficino's supposed "academy" now appears to be nothing more than a kind of secondary school.[45] Indeed, beginning with the so-called "civic humanists" of the early fifteenth century, humanists insisted that philosophy should serve the city by inculcating prudence and other virtues into its citizens.[46] Philosophy now had to address, not a



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professional caste of specially trained experts with its own technical language, but the ruling classes of the city-state: men and women who had studied humanistic Latin but had no special qualifications for philosophical study.[47] Elegance and urbanity became more important than originality or power of thought. If philosophy had been humbled in the medieval schools by being made to dance attendance on theology, the humanists insisted that she learn good manners and sit decently at table with other courtiers of the prince.

The humanist movement greatly enriched the study of philosophy in the Renaissance as it did many other aspects of European culture. It helped broaden and civilize the Christian religion which even in the Renaissance still retained something of its ancient rigor and exclusivism.[48] But it did not produce great philosophers. At its best, in the case of writers like Valla, Machiavelli, More, and Montaigne, it produced witty subversives and incisive *provocateurs* who, in Cassirer's phrase, "determined the problem" to be considered, "[handing] it down in a new form to the following centuries, the centuries of exact science and systematic philosophy."[49] As we have seen, the failure of the humanists to produce great philosophy is perfectly comprehensible, given that the humanist movement had from the beginning bracketed the deepest questions about nature and human existence in the desire to make its peace with religious authority. Some might say that the humanists did not produce great philosophy simply because they were men and women of letters and not professional philosophers. This is true, but it ignores the more basic question of the kind of literature and moral philosophy the humanists chose to write and why they chose to define literature in the way they did. In the ancient world Plato and Lucretius and Seneca – and yes, Augustine – wrote what today we would certainly call great philosophy as well as great literature, but they did not foreclose consideration of the deepest questions about God, nature, and human destiny as the Renaissance humanists generally did. True *libertas philosophandi* would have to await a later age.

## NOTES

1. Giustiniani 1985; Hankins 2003–4, 1: 573–90; on Voigt see Grendler 2006; on Kristeller see Monfasani 2006.
2. Kristeller 1945; Kristeller 1956–96, 1; Campana 1946; Rüdiger 1961; Billanovich 1965.
3. The best treatment of the character and goals of humanism as a movement is Rico 1998.
4. On scholasticism in general see Southern 1995–2001 and Murray 1978, chs. 9–12.
5. Kuttner 1980.
6. Moore 1994.



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7. On the founding of universities see Ferruolo 1985, Southern 1984; De Ridder-Symoens 1992–6, I.
8. For intellectual freedom in the medieval university as a *question mal posée* see Thijssen 1998, 90–112.
9. For medieval and Renaissance scholastic criticisms of Aristotle as "only a man, who could err," see Bianchi 2003, 102–24.
10. Olivi 1941, 37–8.
11. Dales 1990, 132–40.
12. See chapter 5 below.
13. Hankins 2003–4, II: 7–26; for the Latin tradition of Platonism see Gersh 1986.
14. Verbeke 1983; Colish 1985; Strange and Zupko 2004.
15. Laarmann 1995.
16. The phrase *testimonium prophetiae* seems to disclose the influence of Arabic philosophy, especially Avicenna; see D. L. Black 2005, 320–1.
17. South 2003, 373; MacClintock 1956; for attitudes to faith and reason in the Parisian arts faculty see ibid., ch. 4; for Jandun's influence in Italy see ibid., 7–9, and Mahoney 2000, article I, 176.
18. Bianchi 2003, 41–61; Mahoney 2000, article XII.
19. On this question see now Martin 2007.
20. Mahoney 2000, article IX; Poppi 1989, 63–113.
21. Dales 1990.
22. In general see Kessler 1988 and chapters 7 and 11 in this volume.
23. Poppi 1989.
24. Lorenzo de' Medici's attempt to hire Nicoletto Vernia to teach at the Florentine Studio, opposed by Ficino, is instructive; see Hankins 2003–4, II: 288–91.
25. See chapters 4 and 7, below, as well as Mahoney 1982a and Hankins and Palmer 2007 for the study of the Greek commentators.
26. For the humanist critique of scholasticism in general, see Ingegno 1995.
27. Witt 2000, 240: "Perhaps Petrarch's greatest contribution to humanism was his clear formulation of its ethical commitment."
28. Petrarca 2003. References are to the paragraph numbers of this edition; the translations are David Marsh's.
29. Ronconi 1976; Witt 2000.
30. The *Invectives against a Physician (Invectiva contra medicum*) can be found in Petrarca 2003, 2–179; see also Petrarca's *Epistulae seniles* 9.1.
31. Kristeller 1956–96, II: 209–16.
32. See Bianchi 2003, 101–24 for the topos that "Aristotle was only a man and could err."
33. An allusion to Aristotle's *Metaphysics* 2.1, 993b10–11, where Aristotle himself compares human reason's attempt to grasp the divine to a bat looking at the sun (the Greek word for bat being often confused with the word for owl in medieval translations).
34. Hadot 2002.
35. See Macintyre 2006, who similarly blames Renaissance Aristotelians believing that technical analysis of ethical issues could stand in for genuine moral edification.
36. Witt 2000, 249f.
37. Hankins 2003–4, II: 335–7, 343–7. Compare Petrarca's arguments in §111 with those of Henry of Ghent 1979, Quodlibet I, qu. 14.



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38. As is pointed out in Witt 2000, 246f., this involved Petrarca in scaling back the claims of earlier humanists regarding the divine inspiration of the pagan poets.
39. See Witt 2000, 248.
40. Quillen 1995 argues persuasively that Petrarca "invent[ed] an Augustine who not only sanctioned but insisted upon the use of classical literature in the human search for spiritual health," that he misunderstood (willfully?) the historical Augustine's cultural program.
41. See especially *De doctrina christiana* 1.31 and 2.39–40.
42. The canonical group, as established by Kristeller 1956–96, I: 573, consists of grammar, rhetoric, history, poetry, and moral philosophy, but see Kohl 2001, essay VIII, for a less static view.
43. See chapter 10 in this volume.
44. See chapter 4 in this volume.
45. See Hankins 2003–4, II: 187–395, and chapter 2 above. In any case, many scholars, including Paul Oskar Kristeller, regard Ficino as a professional philosopher rather than a humanist.
46. See Hankins 2000a for some recent interpretations of "civic humanism."
47. That rhetoric is a part of philosophy and that philosophy therefore pertains to civil science, of which rhetoric is a species, is maintained by Ermolao Barbaro in his famous controversy with Pico della Mirandola. See Barbaro and Pico della Mirandola 1998, 76, with Francesco Bausi's remarks in the introduction, 23–4, 29–31.
48. Hankins 2006b.
49. Cassirer 1972, 191.



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# 4

LUCA BIANCHI

# Continuity and change in the Aristotelian tradition

The predominant view of historians was once that the philosophy of Aristotle, after spreading throughout Latin Christendom in the wake of the great wave of translations from Greek and Arabic begun around 1125, reached its greatest diffusion in the thirteenth century, came to a profound crisis in the fourteenth, and then suffered in the fifteenth under the challenge of Platonism. As a result, Aristotelianism in the Renaissance survived in only a few "conservative" strongholds – such as the universities of Padua, Coimbra, and Cracow – before it was finally swept away by the coming of modern philosophy and science. Thanks to the work of historians like John Herman Randall, Eugenio Garin, Paul Oskar Kristeller, Charles Schmitt, and Charles Lohr, research in the last sixty years has shown that such an image of the development of European thought is so one-sided as to be substantially false. The point here is not merely to insist on the notable expansion of Aristotelianism in the fourteenth century – for in that century, far from declining, Aristotelian philosophy reinforced its position by consolidating its fundamental role in university instruction, by linking its fate to that of influential philosophical and theological schools, and by obtaining for the first time the explicit support of the papacy.[1] One must go still further and insist that, if the greatest intellectual novelty of the Renaissance was the rediscovery of little-known and forgotten philosophical traditions, Aristotelianism nevertheless remained the predominant one through the end of the sixteenth and into the seventeenth century.

This is not a statement about the superior philosophical value of the Aristotelian tradition, a judgment that could hardly be demonstrated. To say that Aristotelianism was the predominant philosophical tradition is not to say that it was the most original, the most innovative, or even the most important (whatever such terms might signify), but only that it exercised an influence quantitatively greater than that of any other tradition. To confirm this one need only recall that in the Renaissance there was a far larger number of manuscripts, printed editions, translations, and commentaries on Aristotle



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than on any other philosopher. In the sixteenth century alone more translations of Aristotle and his commentators were undertaken, both into Latin and into vernacular languages, than had been produced in all previous centuries. More than three thousand editions of his works were published between the invention of printing and 1600, of which hundreds date from the fifteenth century; by way of comparison, there were only fourteen incunables containing works of Plato. As for commentaries, there are at least twenty times more on Aristotle than on the dialogues of Plato.[2]

In and of themselves these data might not seem particularly significant. One could take exception to the inclusion of certain pseudo-Aristotelian works, such as the *Problemata* and the *Secretum secretorum*, whose vernacular translations became bestsellers, or the *Oeconomica*, which in the Latin of Leonardo Bruni enjoyed an enormous diffusion among humanists, government officials, merchants, and bankers.[3] And even if pseudonymous works are discounted, the overwhelming quantitative supremacy which the major works of Aristotle enjoyed in the Renaissance might be dismissed simply as an obvious consequence of the near monopoly they continued to have in university curricula until the middle of the seventeenth century. Indeed, this privileged position is often considered to be the expression of the conservatism of institutions of higher learning and of their inability to accommodate new philosophical authorities and ideas. It is certainly true that universities long resisted every attempt to reform the teaching of philosophy that called for displacing Aristotle, or at least for limiting his predominant role. One need only think of the reactions in Paris to Peter Ramus' proposed reform of the logic curriculum of the faculty of arts, or of the late and controversial introduction of Plato into certain Italian universities. Nevertheless, the attachment to Aristotle did not derive simply from inertia. Often it was the result of a conscious choice based on religious, theoretical, and above all pedagogic considerations. Rightly or wrongly, the works of the Stagirite seemed to most professional teachers of philosophy the most suitable for learning logic, philosophy, and science. Hence they not only continued to form the basis of instruction in arts faculties in universities throughout Europe, but were also adopted in the new humanist schools, in the reformed universities, and in Jesuit colleges. In 1519 Agostino Nifo raised the question openly: "Why have the works of Aristotle been taught among all peoples, and for many centuries now, in the schools of philosophy?" Giving voice to widespread sentiment, Nifo responded that these works deserved their status for their excellent internal organization, for their demonstrative rigor, and for their explanatory clarity and terminological precision. Such qualities made them much more didactically useful than the works of Plato, whom he criticized for his "bad method of teaching." This judgment is all



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the more significant since, after a youthful flirtation with Averroism, Nifo had opened himself to the influence of Platonism. Although not conceding the theoretical superiority of Aristotle's philosophy over Plato's, Nifo was ready to recognize the historical reasons for its perennial success.[4]

## New translations and the "renaissance" of Aristotle

A multiplicity of different causes, discrete but partially interdependent, underlay the great impulse given to the study of the *Corpus Aristotelicum* during the Renaissance. Important were the influx of Greek scholars into Italy and Europe, the broadening knowledge of classical languages, the foundation of large libraries both public and private, and the invention of printing. The principal cause, however, was that not only scholastic professors of philosophy but also many humanists dedicated their energies to Aristotle and his followers. Both Italian humanists and their Greek teachers, recently arrived in Italy from Byzantium, undertook new Latin translation of their works, often accompanied by glosses and commentaries. These efforts diverged sharply from the medieval approach to the texts, and thus it is right to speak of a "renaissance" of Aristotle. This rebirth, however, differs profoundly from the contemporary "renaissance" of Plato, atomism, and ancient skepticism, all of which were sparked by the rediscovery of previously inaccessible texts. To be sure, some writings of, or attributed to, Aristotle, unknown or only partially known to the Middle Ages, returned to circulation during the Renaissance, such as the *Eudemian Ethics*, the *Magna moralia*, and the *Quaestiones mechanicae*. Nevertheless, in the great majority of cases the "renaissance" of Aristotle consisted not so much in the rediscovery of unknown texts as in the renewed interest in texts long translated into Latin but little studied, and especially in the "restoration" of well-known texts which were now to be read in a new way in order to recover their authentic meaning.

First and foremost, the humanists endeavored to dignify the writings of Aristotle with the literary elegance which, following a belief going back to Cicero and Quintilian and revived by Petrarch, they presumed to characterize the original Greek. Their project to retranslate the entire corpus of the Stagirite was born, therefore, from the conviction that to present Aristotle in elegant Latin dress would be equivalent to resuscitating the true Aristotle. Thanks to the work of Leonardo Bruni, Giannozzo Manetti, Francesco Filelfo, Giorgio Valla, and Ermolao Barbaro, as well as Greek scholars like John Argyropoulos, George Trebizond, Theodore Gaza, and Cardinal Bessarion, this fruitful misconception would evolve into a grand translation movement that would lead, already in the fifteenth century, to the substitution



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of humanistic translations for the putatively ugly and inaccurate medieval translations.[5] Under the patronage of princes and popes this movement experienced an extraordinary expansion during the subsequent century. Its center of activity was also transferred across the Alps to the able care of French and Swiss humanists such as Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples, François Vatables, Joachim Périon, Denis Lambin, Jacques d'Estrebay, and Isaac Casaubon, as well as of Italian scholars working abroad, such as Simone Simoni, Francesco Vimercati, and Giulio Pace.[6]

According to the humanists, word-for-word translation (*verbum e verbo* or *ad verbum*), a technique employed in a wide variety of ways by medieval translators, suffered from three grave defects: it insisted on fidelity to the original Greek to the point of distorting Latin grammar and syntax; it compensated for the supposed lexical poverty of Latin with neologisms, hybrid words, and transliterations; it thereby transformed Aristotle's prose – which, as we have seen, was believed to be highly elegant – into a barbarous language intolerable to the ears of anyone initiated into the mysteries of the Latin classics. To avoid such infelicities the translator must force himself to reproduce in Latin both the content (*rerum doctrina*) and the style (*scribendi ornatus*) of Aristotle by means of a complex rendering *ad sensum* (or *ad sententiam*). The *ad sensum* method was theorized around 1420 by Leonardo Bruni in his treatise *On Correct Translation* (*De interpretatione recta*), which formed part of his bitter polemic against the detractors of his new version of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.[7] In practice it was applied in quite different ways. While some admired beautiful style above all, even at the cost of producing inaccurate translations, others attempted an equilibrium between readability and accuracy. Nevertheless, the medieval translations, although widely scorned, endured throughout the entire fifteenth century as standard texts, and humanist translators often did little more than embellish, revise, and correct them.

The work of humanist translators was heavily conditioned by their classicist prejudices, which caused them to consider words not sanctioned by authors like Cicero and Quintilian to be stylistically defective. This tendency can be seen already in Bruni. Although he was still willing to admit the sixth-century neologisms of Boethius, he rejected the terminology developed by the great translators of the thirteenth century like Robert Grosseteste and William of Moerbeke. Not only did he reject their rougher transliterations like *eutrapelia* or *bomolochia*, but he also eschewed terms which had already entered into common usage in Latin and the vernacular languages. Thus *politica* was replaced with the awkward circumlocution *scientia gubernandarum rerum publicarum* and *democratia* with the misleading *popularis potestas*. Other Italian and Byzantine translators, Argyropoulos



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and Barbaro among them, moved in an analogous direction, stirring up confusion about the meaning of many technical terms in philosophy. By the beginning of the sixteenth century, even the titles of Aristotle's works were changed to accord with the new classicizing sensibility. *De generatione et corruptione*, for example, was rechristened *De ortu et interitu* in 1519 by Vatable.[8]

With his monumental effort to translate nearly all of Aristotle's works into pure Ciceronian Latin, the French Benedictine Joachim Périon revealed the devastating effects which the methods pioneered by the humanists could have. Going well beyond Bruni, Périon argued in his *De optimo genere interpretandi* (1540) that a literal adherence to Aristotle's texts was impossible, and not only due to the profound dissimilarity between the grammar and syntax of Latin and Greek. In his view, a different sentence structure was needed to accommodate the relative lexical poverty of Latin. Since many Greek words have no exact counterpart in Latin, it was necessary to resolve them into long paraphrases. And, since only context can determine the meaning of words, it was necessary to find new Latin renderings each time a given term occurred rather than mechanically plugging in a standard translation. This exacting focus on the concrete use of language, combined with a rigid classicism, caused Périon to reject the entire lexicon which the Latin West had used for a thousand years to discuss logic, metaphysics, physics, and psychology. Having purged key terms like *homonymum*, *ens*, *substantia*, *generatio*, *reminiscentia*, and *intelligibile*, Périon sought to replenish the lexical storehouse with expressions as elegant as they were jumbled and – far too often – ambiguous. Although a commercial success, his versions were unusable by scholars of philosophy. The few who did attempt to make use of them, like the Spaniard Pedro Nuñez and the Italian Agostino Faba, were forced to furnish their readers with glossaries to indicate which terms of the traditional jargon corresponded to Périon's Ciceronianisms.[9]

Périon's translations gave rise to bitter polemics (in which Jacques Louis d'Estrebay and Denis Lambin, among others, participated) and provoked a round of new translations of Aristotle's works in the second half of the sixteenth century. Francesco Vimercati, Simone Simoni, Michael Sofianos, Antonio Riccobono, and Giulio Pace reacted against Périon's excesses by reintroducing postclassical terms ultimately judged essential, such as *ens* and *substantia*, and by promoting a prudent return to word-for-word translation.[10] High quality was a hallmark of most of these translations, but their number, their rapid circulation (made possible by a highly competitive printing industry), and the practice of publishing two or three in rapid succession or even at the same time in parallel columns, created many problems. To take



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just one example, at the end of the sixteenth century the *Nicomachean Ethics* was available in frequently republished medieval and fifteenth-century renditions, beside which were ranged a dozen new ones, plus numerous vernacular translations and paraphrases. One can easily imagine the interpretive and philosophical problems caused by the multitude and variety of widely available versions of the same text. On the one hand, to be sure, it constitutes one cause of the rich variety of interpretations of Aristotle's thought that led Charles Schmitt to speak of many "Renaissance Aristotelianisms."[11] But on the other, it rendered communication among Aristotelian scholars increasingly difficult and, by shattering its linguistic and conceptual unity, contributed decisively to the crisis of the Aristotelian tradition.

## Editions and textual criticism

For the humanists, updating the "barbaric" scholastic translations of Aristotle was only the first of three steps necessary for rediscovering the authentic meaning of his thought. The other two were reading his works in the original Greek and analyzing them with the techniques of philology. Among the most important aspects of Renaissance Aristotelianism is precisely this progressive shift of focus from Aristotle's doctrines to the complex constitution and tradition of his texts. Many factors determined this development. The teaching of Greek émigrés in Italy in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries directed much attention to Aristotle's terminology and to the disparate readings recorded in the manuscripts. The *testimonia* of Diogenes Laertius, Plutarch, and Strabo called attention to the textual tradition of the Stagirite's writings. Through these influences the *Corpus Aristotelicum* came to be seen as an historical artifact whose shape had been crafted by the editorial activity of the great Hellenistic scholars, now themselves objects of imitation. Of greatest importance were the much better understanding of the Greek language and the wider availability of Greek manuscripts of Aristotle.

Deeper contact with the Byzantine world, the immigration of its scholars and scribes to Latin Christendom, and the financial support of bibliophiles, collectors, and patrons are all known to have aided the study and copying of a vast number of literary and philosophical manuscripts brought to Italy in the course of the fifteenth century. A large number of these contained works of Aristotle and his Hellenistic and Byzantine commentators. This process continued for over a century, widening its scope to all of Europe, and achieved astounding results. It is enough to mention that almost half of the more than 2,700 Greek manuscripts of Aristotelica known today date to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.[12] It was the invention of printing, however, that allowed for the unprecedented diffusion of the Greek text of Aristotle.



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The *editio princeps* of the complete works of Aristotle in Greek first saw the light in Venice between 1495 and 1498, thanks to the initiative of Aldus Manutius, the most famous learned printer of the Renaissance, and the work of an international team of scholars led by the Italian Francesco Cavalli and the Englishman Thomas Linacre. The exceptional result long reigned without rivals: "five folio volumes totalling more than two thousand pages, at a time when only a few Greek books had been printed, embellished with a unique typographical elegance, magnificent paper, binding, careful typesetting, excellent proof correction – all the qualities that would satisfy a modern editor of Greek texts."[13]

The undertaking resonated widely but had to wait long for imitators. Until 1520/30, the printing of Aristotle was confined to Latin editions and medieval commentaries produced almost exclusively for a university audience. By 1530, however, the printing of large collections of Aristotelian texts in Greek began to occupy scholars and printers in many countries. The edition of Erasmus was printed in Basel (1531, 1539, 1550), the so-called *aldina minor* of Giovanni Battista Camozzi in Venice (1551–3), the edition of Friedrich Sylburg in Frankfurt (1584–7), and the splendid bilingual, Greek–Latin edition of Isaac Casaubon in Lyon (1590), which presented Aristotle as a typical classical author. From Geneva came the extremely successful edition of Pace (1597), and from Paris that of Guillaume Duval (1619), which would become the standard bilingual edition for the entire seventeenth century.[14] The movement towards northern Europe is obvious and has been noted often by scholars. Nevertheless, Italy did not completely lose its earlier pioneering status. For it was there that certain individual works of Aristotle were prepared in editions of great philological sophistication, such as Pietro Vettori's edition of the *Ethics* (1547 and 1560) and Ludovico Castelvetro's edition of the *Poetics* (1570), the latter graced with a translation and a path-breaking commentary in Italian.[15]

A systematic analysis of the publishing of Aristotle in the period, its principles and techniques, has yet to be carried out. The few but excellent studies that are available reveal that humanist philology, often overly praised, showed many methodological weaknesses when faced with the vast and complex Aristotelian textual tradition. In the early stages, manuscripts for establishing texts were tracked down quite casually, were vaguely identified, and were used without studying their genetic interrelationships. They functioned as mere repositories of variants, from which the scholar took the liberty of choosing the "right" ones. Angelo Poliziano was the first to go beyond this approach and to grasp the necessity of considering the manuscript tradition historically. But the procedures that this approach presupposed – the census and description of all the codices, their collation,



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and critical evaluation – were not, and could not have been, applied to the *Corpus Aristotelicum* in the absence of rigorous techniques for dating, comparing, and establishing the relationship among a great multitude of manuscripts. Even the greatest Aristotelian scholars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries often distinguished with little clarity among the various codices and employed vague chronological terminology (*antiquus*, *vetus*, *vetustissimus*). They had only an approximate knowledge of the history of Greek handwriting and availed themselves of paleography for dating purposes to a much lesser degree than was being done contemporaneously with Latin manuscripts. Yet, with rare exceptions such as Vettori, they retained an excessive faith in the reliability of older manuscripts; they did not collate systematically and reported readings at second hand; they did not develop rigorous and coherent techniques for judging the value of conflicting witnesses; and they introduced numerous conjectural emendations, often plausible but sometimes without any textual basis whatsoever.[16]

It would obviously be anachronistic to judge Renaissance scholars according to the methodological standards of modern philology, developed as they were in the nineteenth century by Lachmann. It is nevertheless well worth noting that these scholars at least attempted to describe the procedures they used, thereby often highlighting and explaining the choices they made. Not only did they cause to flourish a genre of Aristotelian literature – philological glosses – of which the Middle Ages has left few specimens, they played a decisive role in bringing about a new awareness of the inevitable subjectivity of textual reconstruction, and thus of the necessity of intersubjective cooperation. It is no surprise that it was someone intimately acquainted with the Renaissance editorial work on Aristotle, Pedro Nuñez himself, who was among the first to develop an embryonic understanding of the *apparatus criticus*. Convinced that the "variety of the Greek text" constituted the primary cause for the "obscurity of Aristotle," he proposed to invest a group of experts with the task of examining and comparing the "various exemplars" of the writings of the philosopher. They should establish in every controversial locus, "using arguments and conjectures," which was the "most correct reading," but all of the variants, even those considered "less probable," must "be written down in a separate notebook so that each reader should be free to follow the reading he thinks right."[17]

## New hermeneutical principles and the search for the "historical Aristotle"

In 1499 a statute of the University of Pisa required teachers "to read and interpret the texts of the books of Aristotle, but not to explicate commentaries



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on such books," and permitted commentaries to be used as aids to learning only "after the presentation of the text in question." Twenty years later a statute of the University of Leipzig invoked the authority of Seneca to criticize those "sophists" who had neglected to study the texts of Aristotle and claimed "to know him only through commentaries," and enjoined them to make use of the new humanist translations.[18] These orders show how, between the end of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth, even the universities had finally heeded one of the commands issued by Bruni, Barbaro, Poliziano, and Lefèvre d'Étaples: to read neither commentaries nor paraphrases but the works of Aristotle themselves in order to drink of his thought "directly from the spring."[19]

In and of itself, the call to reestablish direct contact with the texts of Aristotle, bypassing the multiple layers of traditional exegesis, was less original than it might seem. The humanists, however, endowed it with a precise polemical meaning against the scholastic commentators. These they accused of reading his texts in order to identify a set of doctrines to be judged according to a criterion of metatemporal truth, or even as a pretext for raising issues that had little or nothing to do with Aristotle. They were convinced for their part that every past work must be studied as documenting a different way of conceiving man and the world, comprehensible only if considered in its precise historical context. They harshly criticized the scholastic question-commentary which had been standard in universities since the middle of the thirteenth century, seeing it as emblematic of a historically insensitive and "sophistic" approach to the thought of Aristotle. Barring rare exceptions, these criticisms were not aimed at the commentary as a genre. Instead they sought to redefine its sense, its scope, and its methods according to new hermeneutical principles. The most important of these was undoubtedly that every author is his own best interpreter, and thus that ambiguous statements and corrupt passages must be understood in the light of other passages by the same author. Originating with the Alexandrian grammarians, this principle was taken up again in the fifteenth century and was openly applied to the Stagirite by Pedro Nuñez and by his student Bartolomé Pasqual, who in orations delivered in 1553 and 1565 at the university of Valencia explained how one could "interpret Aristotle through Aristotle."[20]

Whether or not they appealed to this principle, all Aristotelians of humanist background believed that the ideal commentator must adopt a simple, clear, but elegant style. He must therefore avoid rarefied philosophical jargon while freely illustrating the doctrinal content of the passages in question with *exempla* from literature, history, and the visual arts. He must study the whole corpus of Aristotle's works, preferably in the original language. He must verify the accuracy of the numerous translations and readings,



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identify corrupt passages, and distinguish authentic from spurious works. Finally, he must privilege the Greek interpreters, considered the most trustworthy guides both for their chronological and cultural proximity to Aristotle. Despite encountering strong resistance, especially from some scholastics, this new approach became ever more widely diffused, until by the end of the fifteenth century it was domesticated in the universities. This happened first in Italy. Niccolò Leonico Tomeo's appointment at Padua in 1497 to give lectures based on the Greek text of Aristotle is often considered the symbol of the triumph of "humanist Aristotelianism." This may not have been a real innovation, however, since some years earlier Angelo Poliziano had begun to do the same at the Florentine *studium*.[21]

Whether or not they indicate the beginning of the teaching of Aristotle based on the Greek text, Poliziano's courses on the Philosopher constitute a turning point. Having previously commented on the *Ethics*, Poliziano inaugurated his courses on the *Organon* with two celebrated orations, the *Introduction to Logic* (*Praelectio de dialectica*) of 1491 and the *Lamia* of 1492. In these he outlined an approach that, beyond sounding the dominant motifs of the humanist polemic against scholastic commentators – rejection of the method of *quaestio disputata*, criticism of specialized jargon, the goal of elegance and expository clarity – insisted that the *Corpus Aristotelicum* had to be treated using the same philological methods successfully employed in the case of other ancient texts. Poliziano knew well that his proposal would not please those who continued to view the Stagirite as a timeless thinker to whom one could pose contemporary problems, and were hostile to seeing him as a "classic," an author to be situated in his historical context. Foreseeing their reaction, in the *Lamia* he ironically refuses the title of philosopher and calls himself instead a *philosophaster*, a mere dilettante philosopher, who is content to interpret Aristotle after the manner of the Hellenistic grammarians – i.e. to combine philological expertise with a solid knowledge of Greek language and culture.[22]

The echo of Poliziano's methodological recommendations sounded far and wide. As the teaching of Aristotelian philosophy by way of Greek texts spread outside of Italy (beginning in Paris, where it was the common practice of the *lecteurs royals*), scholars of Aristotle paid growing attention to reconstructing the text, evaluating variant readings of the codices, discussing the correct spelling and exact meaning of Greek terms, and comparing the many Latin translations. At the same time, problems relating to the development, structure, and transmission of the *Corpus Aristotelicum* acquired great importance. Were the works circulating under the name of the Stagirite truly his? What were their original titles? How were they divided internally and what was their logical order? What was their chronological order? What



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was the meaning of the traditional distinction between his esoteric and exoteric books? These questions, often raised in the prefaces to printed editions, in translations, and in commentaries, became the object of separate treatises. Francesco Cavalli's *On the Number and Order of the Subdivisions and Books of Aristotle's Teaching on Physics* (*De numero et ordine partium ac librorum physicae doctrinae Aristotelis*), published at the end of the fifteenth century, launched a new genre of Aristotelian literature to which philosophers like Federico Pendasio and Marcantonio Genova, scholars like Francesco Storella, Celio Secondo Curione, and Ottaviano Ferrari, and translators like Joachim Périon contributed in the following century.[23]

It would surely be wrong to see in all this the expression of a modern historiographical approach. One need only recall the long controversy over the order of Aristotle's works (*de ordine librorum*), which never achieved a "genetic" reconstruction of his thought, but rather reflected the speculative and didactic need to establish criteria for ordering the branches of learning into a hierarchy. Nevertheless, the expertise of sixteenth-century scholars in finding, deciphering, and contextualizing the sources, as well as their attention to the texts' labyrinthine paths of transmission and their sensitivity to terminological and stylistic elements, laid the foundations of method and displayed exemplary critical spirit. However dubious the claim that they recaptured the "historical" Aristotle in the nets of philology, it cannot be denied that their legacy included the decisive rejection of the image of Aristotle inherited from their medieval predecessors.

## The rediscovery of the Greek commentators and the continuing influence of medieval commentaries

The humanists' predilection for the Greek interpreters of Aristotle has already been mentioned. Theodore Gaza first drew attention to them with his translation in 1452/3 of the *Problemata* of Alexander of Aphrodisias. Inspired by that effort, in 1472/3 Ermolao Barbaro translated Themistius' paraphrases of the *Posterior Analytics*, the *Physics*, and the *De anima*, which were not published, however, until 1481. Girolamo Donato, a friend and disciple of Barbaro, followed his example by rendering various fragments of Alexander of Aphrodisias into Latin. Among these was the first book of his *De anima* commentary, sought after by philosophers like Nicoletto Vernia and Agostino Nifo even before its publication (1495). Now began a new phase in the history of the Aristotelian tradition, in which all of the surviving Greek commentaries, only partially known in the Middle Ages, were rediscovered, translated, and published. Here too Aldus Manutius played a decisive role.



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Finishing the first volume of his Greek edition of Aristotle's complete works in 1495, he announced his further intention to publish the commentaries of Alexander of Aphrodisias, Porphyry, Themistius, Simplicius, and Philoponus. This ambitious project, enlarged upon in prefaces to subsequent volumes and sponsored by Alberto Pio, prince of Carpi, was begun by Manutius but could only be finished by his successors between 1520 and 1530. In the next decade, Latin translations of the Greek commentators of Aristotle began to multiply. A few translators like Giovanni Battista Camozzi, and printers like Ottaviano and Gerolamo Scoto in Venice, even specialized in this field, giving a further example of the competition between translations already noted. Attention was soon directed to the Byzantine commentaries as well, which, with the important exception of those on the *Nicomachean Ethics* translated by Grosseteste, had remained more or less unknown to the Latin Middle Ages. Beginning in the middle of the sixteenth century, Byzantine commentators such as Michael Psellos and Theodore Metochites became available in the Latin world.[24]

The availability of these new interpretive tools had a great impact on philosophical debate. To take only two examples, the recovery of Alexander of Aphrodisias' and Simplicius' commentaries on the *De anima* intensified the already bitter controversies over the correct interpretation of Aristotelian psychology, while a better knowledge of Philoponus' commentaries, which were sharply critical of the teachings of the *Physics* and the *De caelo*, provoked a profound reconsideration of Aristotle's natural philosophy that still echoed in Galileo.[25] Nevertheless, the medieval commentaries, both Arabic and Latin, did not lose their influence. It is true that the reputation of Averroes, since the thirteenth century known as The Commentator, came under heavy attack. Many considered his reading of Aristotle unreliable because based on inaccurate Arabic versions, while the little good to be found in his writings was dismissed as "stolen" from Greek interpreters.[26] All the same, interest not only in Averroes' commentaries but in his entire *oeuvre* grew enormously from the end of the fifteenth century and involved the most celebrated teachers at Padua and Bologna such as Vernia, Nifo, Pomponazzi, Alessandro Achillini, and Marcantonio Zimara, as well as thinkers of a quite different stamp such as Pico della Mirandola. Thus in the sixteenth century, Averroistic Aristotelianism enjoyed the widest possible diffusion, especially in Italy, thanks in part to new translations of texts already available in the Middle Ages, in part to the translation of texts previously unknown, and in part to grandiose editions, like the famous and still indispensable Giuntine edition of 1550–2, which contained the works of Aristotle, the commentaries of Averroes, and a rich apparatus of indexes, *tabulae*, and explanatory glosses.[27]



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The fate of the great Latin interpreters of Aristotle like Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas, Giles of Rome, John of Jandun, Walter Burley, and John Buridan was analogous. In the second half of the fifteenth century, their commentaries continued to be printed, studied, and used, and not only by scholastic Aristotelians. Humanists too, despite their invectives against the university "barbarians" of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, often had recourse to their ideas, generally without attribution. It is striking, for example, that a great Greek scholar like George Trebizond would solve one of the few problems examined in his *scholia* to the *Physics* – that of motion in a vacuum – with a paraphrase of Thomas Aquinas' views on the matter.[28] F. Edward Cranz has emphasized that the printing of medieval Latin commentaries suffered a marked contraction after 1535,[29] but the significance of this phenomenon must not be overstated. On the one hand there were notable exceptions to the trend, like the enduring success of the commentaries of Thomas Aquinas and John of Jandun. On the other hand, the decline in the printing of medieval *expositiones* and *quaestiones* is more likely due to a saturation of the book market than to lack of interest, given that the great Aristotelian philosophers of the sixteenth century demonstrate an excellent knowledge of medieval exegesis.

The profound transformation of the "Peripatetic library" in the Renaissance should not be seen as tantamount to an overthrow of the medieval tradition, as Poliziano delightedly predicted while gazing at his bookshelves lined with Theophrastus, Alexander of Aphrodisias, Themistius, Ammonius, Simplicius, and Philoponus.[30] It led, rather, to an enrichment of the exegetical environment. The various interpretive traditions produced in the span of fifteen centuries in different cultural, linguistic, and religious contexts became accessible and comparable. If some were bewildered by the wide differences that emerged from this multiplication of critical perspectives, others (like the Jesuits of Coimbra) resolved to reconcile and unite them, while still others (like John Case) were determined to cull the most essential sources for a representative synthesis of Aristotelian philosophy, thus taking an important step on the commentary's evolution into the textbook.[31]

## Competition with other philosophical traditions

The superabundance of materials made available by the energetic printing of Aristotle certainly offered marvelous opportunities, but it also presented unforeseen difficulties. Already, hardly one hundred years after the invention of the printing press, the number of works dedicated to Aristotle – translations into both Latin and vernacular tongues, commentaries, paraphrases, compendia, and florilegia – amounted to many thousands of titles. Only the



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growing practice of compiling "Aristotelian bibliographies," which reported, sometimes with fine discrimination, the principal editions, translations, and commentaries of the various works of the Philosopher, enabled professional philosophers, scholars, booksellers, and amateurs to orient themselves in the *mare magnum* of Aristotelian literature.[32] It is noteworthy that these "Aristotelian bibliographies" often included texts written by authors who had little in common with, or were even openly hostile to Aristotle's thought. This perhaps surprising fact provides an excellent example of how Renaissance Aristotelianism was able to incorporate heterogeneous elements. Although not a novelty – since late antiquity the Aristotelian tradition had absorbed many ideas arriving from foreign philosophic territory, above all from Neoplatonism – this phenomenon definitely accelerated beginning in the fifteenth century, when Aristotle's thought acquired a different status. Despite its enduring predominance in arts education, it could no longer be identified with the whole of philosophy. As Crisostomo Javelli would write during the controversy over Pomponazzi's treatise on immortality, "the philosophy of Aristotle and philosophy *qua* philosophy no longer coincide [*non convertuntur*]. In fact, philosophy in itself is the knowledge of pure truth and perfection, while the philosophy of Aristotle is not perfect."[33]

Javelli, a Dominican theologian of Thomist persuasion, authored commentaries on the major works of the Stagirite and was certainly no anti-Aristotelian; he was uttering sentiments which by that time were widely diffused. When set beside Plato, the Atomists, the Stoics, and the skeptics, Aristotle lost the status he enjoyed in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries as *the* Philosopher and returned to that of *one* ancient philosopher among many. There is no need to dwell on the bitter controversy over the *comparatio* between Plato and Aristotle, born of a tract issued in Florence in 1439 by Gemistus Pletho, carried on over several decades, revived in the later sixteenth century, and involving figures of the caliber of George Trebizond, Bessarion, and later Francesco Patrizi of Cherso.[34] Instead it is useful to remember that Petrarch, when declaring his preference for Plato, had harshly criticized the conception of happiness elaborated in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which he judged incompatible with Christianity. The notion that Aristotelian morality, and even classical ethics generally, had been completely surpassed by the teaching of the Gospels was taken up by eminent humanists, Valla and Vives among them.[35] The chief target for them, however, was not Aristotle's ethics but his logic.

In the *Elegantiae* and the *Dialecticae disputationes*, Valla maintained that the value of this discipline had been largely overestimated. Since language can be persuasive or even compelling, even when it is not formally valid,



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attention had to be shifted from the study of correct inferential mechanisms to that of effective communicative strategies. On the other hand, Valla was convinced that a good portion of the logical problems considered by Aristotle and the scholastics were actually pseudo-problems solvable by means of grammatical and syntactical analysis of language and current usage. Rudolph Agricola, Juan Luis Vives, Peter Ramus, and Mario Nizolio developed this proposition and transformed it into a pedagogical project, trying and partially succeeding in replacing the teaching of Aristotelian logic with rhetorical and dialectical logic.[36]

If detailed criticisms were leveled against individual teachings of Aristotle – not only ethical and logical but also physical and metaphysical – there were also many attacks launched directly against his authority and the actual or presumed dogmatism of his followers. Authors like Petrarch, Valla, Rudolph Agricola, Girolamo Cardano, and Ramus denounced the Aristotelians' overreliance on their master's authority, exhorted them not to deify Aristotle, and stressed that he, like every other human being, was fallible. These polemics enjoyed enduring success. Picked up by skeptics like Gianfrancesco Pico and Francisco Sanchez, they were consecrated in the hallowed pages of Bacon, Galileo, Descartes, Hobbes, and Gassendi. Effective against a small number of obtuse and dogmatic Aristotelians, of whom there was no lack in the seventeenth century, these invectives are more original in their form than in their substance, and they appear paradoxically to be debtors to the very tradition of thought against which they were directed. Aristotle himself had insisted on the superiority of truth to personal feelings and had criticized the Pythagoreans for worshiping their master's statements. Accordingly, many Aristotelians openly defended the right of each person to think for himself. Even the adage according to which "Aristotle was a man and could err," repeated by generations of anti-Aristotelians from Petrarch to the Enlightenment thinkers, was borrowed from Aristotelians, who had formulated it in the thirteenth century (with Albertus Magnus and Siger of Brabant) and were still defending it in the sixteenth (with Pomponazzi and Nuñez).[37]

Challenged by critics and subjected to the competition of other philosophical schools, Aristotelianism evolved in many different ways during the Renaissance. It always, however, displayed a great capacity to modify its categories and teachings based on new problems and new discoveries. On the one hand, recent theoretical and material advances, especially in disciplines like mathematics, astronomy, physics, geography, and natural history, were integrated into a worldview that remained substantially Aristotelian. Emblematic was the *Philosophia magnetica* (1629), in which Niccolò Cabeo reformulated Aristotelian ontology to make room for the quality of



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magnetism as described by William Gilbert's experimental data.[38] On the other hand, works aimed at interpreting Aristotelian thought made use of methods, problems, and concepts originating in other traditions, both ancient and contemporary. With regard to method, it is striking that many popularizers of Aristotle adopted in their vernacular paraphrases the dialogue form, normally favored by humanists and often presented as typically Platonic or Ciceronian. Regarding problems and concepts, the evidence is potentially infinite. As Schmitt has pointed out, all Renaissance Aristotelians were in a certain sense eclectics.[39]

The constant tendency in the history of Aristotelianism to merge with other philosophies has already been mentioned, and it is well known that, from Avicenna to Thomas Aquinas, many medieval thinkers had sought to reread Aristotle's metaphysics in a Neoplatonic light in order better to meet the needs of their faith in a single God and creator. Pico's and Ficino's notions of the *concordia philosophorum*, and the influence of late ancient commentators like Themistius and Simplicius, gave a tremendous push to the search for an accord between Aristotelianism and Platonism. This can be seen in the proliferation of works by philosophers like Symphorien Champier, Sebastian Fox Morcillo, Gabriele Buratelli, Francesco de' Vieri, Jacopo Mazzoni, and others, which, often beginning with the title page, insisted on the "symphony," the "consensus," the "harmony," or the "reconciliation" between Aristotle and Plato.[40] In addition to these new works on the concord between Aristotelianism and Platonism, fresh forms of syncretism cropped up in the span of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. One need only consider the coexistence of Aristotelian and Stoic elements in Pomponazzi, the integration of Averroism with Ockhamism in Achillini, and the synthesis of Aristotelian, Averroistic, Platonic, Neoplatonic, and magical-hermetic motifs in Nifo.[41] In the middle of the sixteenth century, the adaptive spirit of Aristotelianism manifested itself in an extreme form: the attempt to harmonize the teachings of the master with philosophies that he had openly attacked but were coming back into vogue. By cleverly exploiting a few ideas in the fourth book of the *Meteorologica*, Julius Caesar Scaliger even tried to get around the incompatibility of Aristotelian hylomorphism with Democritean atomism in order to elaborate a paradoxical "Aristotelian corpuscularism."[42]

## The vitality of the Aristotelian tradition in the Renaissance

We have seen how the Aristotelian tradition during the Renaissance was able to transform and differentiate itself, to redefine its own problems, and to absorb elements originating in other currents of thought. This doctrinal



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elasticity poses a serious problem for historians: does it still make sense to speak of "Aristotelianism" in the Renaissance once we become aware of the remarkably wide divergence among thinkers who called themselves interpreters, even followers, of Aristotle? Scholars have offered different responses. For some, all "Aristotelians," in order to be counted as such, must have accepted the same "system of thought" or at least an irreducible core of theoretical positions. For others, they need share only a common set of sources, principles, problems, and methods for approaching these problems. Among those in the second camp, Charles Schmitt has convincingly argued that in the Renaissance there was a multiplicity of "Aristotelianisms" in competition with one another.[43] A merit of this approach has been its recognition that the Aristotelian tradition in the Renaissance, far from being the monolithic body of dogma it was once thought to be, comprised a rich plurality of orientations, and that these, both because of strictly intellectual conflicts and because of geographic, institutional, religious, linguistic, and sociological factors, ensured its vitality and differentiated development.

It remains to emphasize that these differences were so profound as to render inadequate the traditional distinction between currents ("Alexandrians," "Averroists," "Simplicians," "Thomists," "Albertists") and schools (the "school of Padua").[44] Even Schmitt's broad distinctions between "scholastic" and "humanist" Aristotelians, or between "a-religious," "religious," and "ultra-religious" interpreters of Aristotle, must be used with prudence. As for the first distinction, we have seen that, at least since the end of the fifteenth century, scholastically trained Aristotelians welcomed many humanist innovations, and it may be added that many humanists showed themselves much more receptive to the ideas of their medieval predecessors than they themselves would be willing to admit, or than modern scholars usually recognize. Regarding the second distinction, it could be argued that the philosophic agenda of *all* Aristotelians was, paradoxically, influenced by religious issues more in the Renaissance than in the Middle Ages. Even the likes of Pomponazzi, Achillini, and Boccadiferro, who insisted most on the differences between the objects and methods of philosophy and theology, nevertheless ended up placing at the center of their thought questions like the immortality of the soul, human freedom, the existence of miracles, and the nature and attributes of God. However that may be, one of the unforeseen effects of the "unleashing of the *auctores*" promoted by the humanists was to facilitate the introduction of specifically Christian elements into the Aristotelian tradition. The commentaries of a proto-Protestant like Lefèvre d'Étaples, those of a doctor converted to Lutheranism like Simone Simoni, and even those of a "lay" master like Boccadiferro, contain numerous biblical citations and make use of religious sources, principles,



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and theological concepts much more than the commentaries of Thomas Aquinas.[45]

Obviously, the precise image historians have today of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Aristotelianism differs remarkably from that sketched by its contemporary opponents. When offering Platonism as the only valid antidote to the heterodox tendencies of Aristotelianism, Ficino maintained that the whole of philosophy in his age was dominated by "Averroists" and "Alexandrians," opposed in their interpretations of the Stagirite's psychology but united in their denial of the immortality of the soul.[46] This was undoubtedly a polemical simplification and not a faithful description of reality. Nevertheless it has long contributed to the ever-broadening and still more simplistic conviction that Renaissance thought was characterized by the effort to substitute Platonism for a senescent Aristotelianism, exhausted by its extended controversy over the nature of the soul. It is indisputable that this controversy, with its interweaving of exegetic, philosophic, and religious problems, played a central role and witnessed the participation of some of the sharpest minds of the age, like Cardinal Cajetan (Thomas de Vio), Pomponazzi, Nifo, and Zabarella.[47] It is also indisputable, however, that the vitality of Renaissance Aristotelianism did not exhaust itself here.

For some time much has been made of the debate among Paduan Aristotelians, from Paul of Venice in the fifteenth century down to Jacopo Zabarella at the end of the sixteenth, over the notion of *regressus* found in the *Posterior Analytics*, whose object was to establish how demonstrative knowledge could be increased by combining induction and deduction. Although it is debatable whether the origin of Galileo's scientific method is to be found in these discussions (as Randall believed), or in their continuation at the Collegio Romano (as William Wallace would have it),[48] this doubt in no way diminishes their importance. Indeed, it calls for their reconsideration within a broader context. Many Aristotelians, and not only Paduan Aristotelians, reflected deeply on the methodological and epistemological issues central to the emergence of early modern science, issues such as the certainty of mathematics and its relationship to natural philosophy.[49]

Also notable were the discussions brought forth by the dialogue between Aristotelian teachings and problems resulting from the evolving cultural and social context. The prestige of the *studia humanitatis* conferred a greater emphasis on works little studied in the Middle Ages like the *Poetics*, which dominated literary criticism throughout the sixteenth century and was adapted to literary genres nonexistent in Aristotle's time.[50] On the other hand, a text like the *Politics*, intensely studied since the end of the thirteenth century, not only continued to furnish a conceptual framework for thinking



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about different regimes but was also used to confront questions of immediate relevance. Emblematic was the polemic that developed between Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda and the Dominican theologians Francisco Vitoria and Bartolomé de Las Casas, who used Aristotelian categories to discuss the morality of subjecting Amerindians to Spanish colonization.[51]

Even Aristotelian physics and cosmology experienced noteworthy changes. Since the middle of the sixteenth century they had been the object both of violent attacks by anti-Aristotelians, like Telesio, Patrizi, and Bruno, and of ever more thorough and specialized study. Despite the humanists' philological scruples and the rediscovery of the Greek commentators, which fostered a tendency to recover Aristotle's genuine worldview, the most important innovations of late medieval natural philosophy were rejected by only a minority of professional philosophers. To take only one example, medieval contributions to mechanics remained a focus of attention for Parisian masters at the Collège de Montaigu like John Mair and Johannes Dullaert. Unconcerned with the abuse heaped by humanists on the "British barbarians," they continued to make use of logico-mathematical techniques for describing motions devised at the beginning of the fourteenth century by the English *Calculatores* of the so-called "Merton School." One of Mair's students was Domingo de Soto, in whose commentary on the *Physics* (printed in its entirety in 1551) the theory of the so-called "mean speed theorem" (i.e. the theorem giving the measure of uniform acceleration in terms of its medial velocity), which had been formulated by the *Calculatores* as a mere mathematical model, was finally applied to falling bodies.[52] An analogous attention to empirical reality is seen in the numerous commentaries on the *De caelo*, the *Meteorologica*, and the *De animalibus*, where Aristotle's conclusions based on astronomical, geographical, zoological, and anatomical observations, now clearly superseded by empirical observations of modern explorers and natural philosophers, were refuted and corrected.[53]

Once again, Renaissance Aristotelians defied the polemical caricatures of their adversaries, the most famous of which was offered in the character of Simplicius in Galileo's *Dialogue of Two World Systems*. If in Galileo's literary fiction the sole preoccupation of Aristotle's champion was to save the teachings of his master from the barrage of logical and empirical objections launched by his interlocutors, in reality many philosophers continued to appeal to Aristotle, not to insist with obstinate dogmatism on a fractured worldview, but rather to defend a way of conceiving of philosophy and its work. Certainly they retained a rather bookish notion of knowledge, which they proposed to advance by subjecting the Aristotelian corpus to complex interpretative procedures, a corpus they believed had provided a foundation or at least a stable theoretical synthesis for the encyclopedia of philosophic



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knowledge. Nevertheless, some of them laid great stress on empirical observation and on the limits of human knowledge. The word "naturalism" has often been used to characterize this approach. An ambiguous expression, it has fed the misunderstanding that Aristotelianism, in the radical form it assumed especially at the universities of Padua and Bologna in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, anticipated modern science, rationalism, and atheism. Yet it remains true that from Pomponazzi to Zabarella Italian Aristotelians were able to defend, in a Europe torn by religious conflicts, the methodological and deontological ideals that had been elaborated by their Parisian predecessors in the thirteenth century. These included a "scientific" approach to the investigation of reality, in the Aristotelian sense of reasoning from effects to causes; the practice of speaking "as natural philosophers," "as physicists," prescinding from consideration of supernatural hypotheses and phenomena; and the practice of distinguishing demonstrable knowledge from the postulates of revelation, thus avoiding confusion between the truths of reason and the truths of faith.

[Translated by Patrick Baker]

## NOTES

1. Bianchi 1999, 129–62.
2. For these data see Schmitt 1983a, 14; Kraye 1995b (who emphasizes the difficulty of establishing the number of incunables of Aristotle, 189–93); Lohr 1988, xiii; Hankins 1990a, I: 3, n. 1; II: 739–44; and Hankins and Palmer 2007.
3. For this last point see the documentation offered by Soudek 1968 and 1976.
4. Nifo 1559a, *praefatio* [folios unnumbered].
5. Garin 1947–50, 57–8.
6. For a general presentation of Aristotelian translations in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, see Garin 1947–50 and Schmitt 1983a, 64–88; Copenhaver 1988a thoroughly examines the impact of humanistic views about terminology and style on Renaissance philosophical translations.
7. Indispensable references on Bruni, his conception of translation, and the related polemics are Harth 1968, Gerl 1981, Hankins 1990a, I: 42–8, 2001, and 2003–4, I: 193–239.
8. Schmitt 1983a, 20, 86–7.
9. On Faba, see Cranz 1976a, 363–4; for Nuñez, Bianchi 2003, 154–5, 176–9. On Périon, among others see Stegmann 1976, 378–9, 383–4 and Schmitt 1983a, 72–6.
10. See Schmitt 1983a, 76–85, Bianchi 2003, 152–60.
11. See below, p. 65.
12. I take this statistic from Argyropoulos and Caras 1980, 9–11, where it is shown that of a total of 2,773 manuscripts no less than 1,263 are datable to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.
13. Minio-Paluello 1972, 489; but for a more precise evaluation of the quality of the Aldine edition, Sicherl 1976 is fundamental. On the role of Linacre and Cavalli, see Schmitt 1984a, article XII, 68–70 and article XIII, 307–12.



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14. Schmitt 1983a, 36–44.
15. On the movement northward, see Schmitt 1983a, 37; the role of Italy, and of Venice in particular, is insisted on by Minio-Paluello 1972, 483–500. On Castelvetro's use of Aristotle's *Poetics* see Weinberg 1961.
16. In the absence of a comprehensive study of Aristotelian philology in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, useful information on individual problems and authors is to be found in Kassel 1962, Glucker 1964, Sellin 1974, Sicherl 1976, Grafton 1983–93, I: 52–62, Porro 1983, Avezzù 1987–8, Perfetti 1996, Perfetti 2000, 144–6.
17. Nuñez 1677 (first edn 1554), 107–8. On this subject, Bianchi 2003, 167–8, 202–3.
18. The statute of Pisa is published in Verde 1973–94, IV.3: 1339; that of Leipzig in Zarnke 1861, 39.
19. The image of the spring, taken from Horace, is found in Leonardo Bruni's *Isagogicon moralis disciplinae* (published in Bruni 1996, 204) and graces the frontispiece of Lefèvre d'Étaples' edition (1503) of the *Organon* (pictured in Lefèvre d'Étaples 1972, 87).
20. On these treatises and the decisive role in Renaissance Aristotelianism of the principle that every author is *sui ipsius interpres*, see Bianchi 2003, 194–208.
21. On the teaching of Aristotle in Greek, see Schmitt 1983a, 37 and Schmitt 1984a, article XIII, 288–9, along with the clarifications of Bianchi 2003, 180–3.
22. Poliziano 1986, 18.
23. A comprehensive study of this variegated literature is lacking. On Cavalli, see Schmitt 1984a, article XIII, 287–313; on Storella, see Antonaci 1966, 137–66 and Schmitt 1984a, article IX, 126–8. The debate over the authenticity of certain works or parts of works attributed to Aristotle has been adroitly reconstructed in Kraye 1988a, 1990, 1991, 1995a.
24. A comprehensive synthesis on this topic is found in Lohr 2000; see also Hankins and Palmer 2007. In addition, indispensable are Schmitt 1983a, 24–5, Schmitt 1984a, article VI, 55–8 (which clarifies the role of Manutius, his collaborators, and his successors) and article XV, 327, n. 48 (where the centrality of Venice in the printing history of Greek commentaries is emphasized). On Nifo's and Vernia's use of translations of Donato, see Mahoney 1968.
25. On the impact of the commentaries on the *De anima*, see especially Nardi 1958, 365–422 and Mahoney 1968; Mahoney 2000. For Philoponus, see Schmitt 1989, article VIII, 210–30; and Hankins and Palmer 2007.
26. Especially popular was the theory of Barbaro that "[Averroes'] every word was an act of theft from Alexander, Themistius, Simplicius" (Barbaro 1943, I: 92). Ficino 2001–6, V: 9 (15.2) is typical.
27. Wolfson 1961, Cranz 1976b, Schmitt 1984a, article VIII, 121–42 and chapter 7 in this volume.
28. The text is published in Monfasani 1984, 608–10.
29. Cranz and Schmitt 1984, xiii.
30. In the *Lectio de dialectica*, found in Poliziano 1970–1, I: 529.
31. On Case, see Schmitt 1985, 56–72 and Schmitt *et al.* 1988, 801. On the philosophical textbook see below.
32. Lohr 1981, Bianchi 1990b, Bianchi 2003, 173–5.
33. Javelli 1538, fol. 41v. On this text, see Gilson 1961, 262–74.
34. On this notorious controversy, see chapter 5 in this volume.



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35. For Petrarch see *De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia*, in Petrarca 2003, 222–363. For general observations on the relationship between ancient and Christian ethics in the Renaissance, see Kraye 1988b, 319–25.
36. On humanist logic, fundamental are Ong 1958, Vasoli 1968, Jardine 1988a, and Mack 1993. On Valla and Agricola, see also Jardine 1977, 1983, and 1988b; see also chapter 10 in this volume. On Vives, see Guerlac 1979; on Ramus, see Bruyère 1984; on Nizolio, see Rossi 1953 and Wessler 1974.
37. Bianchi 2003, 101–32.
38. The Aristotelians' flexibility and ability to assimilate new data in natural philosophy has been emphasized by Grant 1978, Baroncini 1981, Schmitt 1983a, 92, 103–6. On Cabeo, see Pumfrey 1990, 181–3.
39. On the use of dialogic method in Renaissance Aristotelianism, see Bianchi 2000. A full analysis of the various forms of eclecticism among Renaissance Aristotelians is offered by Schmitt 1983a, 89–109.
40. A list of the principle texts regarding this question is offered by Matton 1986, 71–3. For the role of Themistus and Simplicius in introducing Neoplatonic conceptual schemes into Renaissance Aristotelianism, see Mahoney 1982a.
41. For Pomponazzi, see Kristeller 1983; for Achillini, see Nardi 1958, 179–279 and Matsen 1974; for Nifo, see Zambelli 1975 and Mahoney 2000.
42. See Lüty 2001.
43. Schmitt 1971, 17, 29 and Schmitt 1983a, 10, 111–12 (where Wittgenstein's notion of "family resemblance" is applied to the Aristotelian tradition). Different approaches to this problem are in Grant 1987 and Thijssen 1991.
44. Kristeller 1965c, 160–1, and Gilbert 1967, 43, were among the first to caution against speaking of "currents" and "movements" within Renaissance Aristotelianism.
45. For Schmitt, see 1983a, 15–22, 28–33. For scholastic influences on humanists, see, for example, the cases of Donato Acciaiuoli and Ermolao Barbaro, examined respectively in Bianchi 2003, 11–39 and in Bianchi 2004, 351–8. The use of Scripture in commentaries on the *Ethics* is pointed out by Kraye 1988b, 347–8; for references to theological authorities in commentaries on the *Physics*, see Murdoch 1990, 167. One could cite numerous examples.
46. See Ficino 1959, I: 872.
47. See chapter 11 in this volume.
48. Among others, see Randall 1961 (which contains his classic 1940 essay on "the development of scientific method in the School of Padua"), Papuli 1983 (which studies the body of debates at Padua on *regressus*) and Wallace 1984, 1991, 1992. Scholars like N.W. Gilbert, E. Garin, and N. Jardine, however, have argued convincingly that the origin of Galileo's method is not so much the Aristotelian theory of *regressus* as the geometric method of Euclid, Archimedes, and Pappus Alexandrinus.
49. An excellent attempt to study the methodological framework of Renaissance Aristotelians as a whole is Di Liscia, Kessler, and Methuen 1997. For the controversy over the epistemological status of mathematics and its relationship with physics, see Giacobbe 1972a, 1972b, and 1973, Davi Daniele 1983, De Pace 1993, and Romano 1999, 134–62.
50. For this last point, see Weinberg 1961, 560.
51. See Hanke 1959 and 1974, and chapter 13, below.



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52. Among others, see Murdoch 1990, Lohr 2002a (which highlights the growth in this period in the number of commentaries on the *libri naturales*) and Lines 2001 and 2002b (which document the tendency of teachers at universities like Padua and Bologna to specialize in natural philosophy). For de Soto, see Clagett 1959, 555–6.
53. Having received reliable reports confirming the presence of humans in the "equinoctial" zones, Pomponazzi declared to his students that the contrary arguments in Aristotle and Averroes had no worth whatsoever, since "against the truth demonstrations cannot be given" (see Nardi 1965b, 41–3, 83–4, 377–8).



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# 5

CHRISTOPHER S. CELENZA

# The revival of Platonic philosophy[1]

"Plato is praised by greater men, Aristotle by a greater number." This pithy statement by Petrarch (1304–74) in his work *On His Own Ignorance and That of Many Others* is best read in context. Petrarch goes on in the same passage: "each of them is worthy of praise both by great men and by many – by all, really."[2] On the one hand, Petrarch reflects here a medieval commonplace, inherited from St. Augustine (354–430): that of all the ancient pagan philosophies, Platonism came the closest to Christian truth. Even more precisely, Augustine said: the ancients who had believed things about the creator that were close to "us" were represented by "Plato and those who had understood him correctly."[3] This process of "understanding" a past thinker is significant. It is primarily exegetical, and those who embraced it – as many adherents of Platonism in the Renaissance did – assumed that it was their responsibility as interpreters to bring out the truth of the ancient thinker or school that they were investigating.

On the other hand, Petrarch gives voice here to a historically specific sentiment which in the late fourteenth century was finding expression not only in the nascent humanist movement but also in other areas of spiritual and intellectual life, even in the realm of scholastic philosophy: that there was something about institutionalized forms of learning that was not responding to contemporary needs, that there existed a restrictive manner in which knowledge was being channeled, and that institutional structures of higher learning were lending themselves to a sometimes unhelpful social reproduction.[4] The result of this social reproduction was that certain key questions associated with "philosophy" from the days of Socrates were becoming more difficult to answer satisfactorily.

What is the purpose of philosophy, one might ask. Am I becoming a better person through philosophy? Am I growing wiser, as opposed to more informed? Do I know what I know and do what I do in a way that is self-reflective; or are my life and the things I do in it unexamined, repetitive, conditioned more by my training than by the exigencies of the moment? Is



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my place in the world meaningful? If one asks these questions, one asks the questions that make philosophy what it really is, what it aspires to, and what it means in an ethical sense. Though educational channels might not reflect it, these questions are at the heart of what keeps us intellectually alive.

Education is an inherently conservative enterprise. By Petrarch's day the number of universities was growing, and the two standard written forms of treating philosophical problems – the *quaestio* or "question" (related to the classroom practice of the scholastic disputation) and the commentary (related to the classroom practice of the *lectura*) – were not suited to addressing these larger questions. This is not to say that many humanists did not profit from the time they spent at universities or even that universities were not, eventually, amenable to incorporating humanist trends.[5] Still, during Petrarch's lifetime, even members of the scholastic world felt this sense of the inadequacy of the written culture of institutionalized learning. Some of them began to compose their work in a new genre of scholastic writing, the "tract," or *tractatus*, a treatise written in a more generalized fashion than the question or commentary and suitable for circulation outside the university world.[6]

In any case, the types of general questions alluded to above do not have definitive, unchallengeable, and timeless answers. Their importance lies in being asked anew by every generation; these questions have as much to do with one's style of life as with the acquisition of information. When philosophy becomes institutionalized, in other words, its practitioners begin to address questions because they are in the curriculum, not because they necessarily have value in contemporary life. In Petrarch's case, as in that of many who followed him, the shorthand for "institutionalized learning" was "Aristotle," or better, "Aristotelians." Petrarch realized that his quarrel was not so much with Aristotle as a historical figure or as a philosopher, but rather with institutions that placed Aristotle at the center of philosophical life at universities, practices that had made Aristotle "The Philosopher" instead of "a philosopher."

Petrarch's own knowledge of Plato remained vague. Although he never managed to learn Greek thoroughly enough to read it fluently, he was nevertheless proud to own a Greek manuscript of certain of Plato's dialogues.[7] Partial versions of Plato's *Timaeus* had been available early, translated by Cicero and later by Calcidius; the latter's translation and commentary were widely diffused and found in many medieval libraries. Plato's short dialogue *Meno* and the *Phaedo* were available in the Latin translation of the twelfth-century Sicilian Henricus Aristippus; and William of Moerbeke, who did yeoman work translating for Thomas Aquinas, rendered into Latin Proclus' *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, in which a part of Plato's *Parmenides* was preserved. The rest remained to be translated.[8] The



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texture of medieval knowledge of Platonism also took shape from certain works of a near-contemporary of Proclus (AD 411–85), pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, who was believed throughout the Middle Ages to be that very Dionysius mentioned in Acts 17, the first Gentile convert to Christianity. From Dionysius (pseudo), whose works were translated from Greek into Latin in the ninth century, Western medieval thinkers inherited the notion of "negative theology." The guiding leitmotif of this style of thought was that we human beings in our finiteness could never adequately know God, in his infinite majesty. But we could at least approach him through saying what he was not. As the Middle Ages wore on, this type of approach became woven deeply into the fabric of medieval mysticism, forming part of the deep background to Platonism's association with secrecy and esoteric knowledge, even though Western thinkers until the fifteenth century lacked the greater part of Plato's actual texts.

At any rate, Petrarch possessed the kind of information alluded to above: a social memory among learned elites that associated Platonism with Christianity, with the immortality of the human soul, with rewards and punishments for that soul after death, and with belief in a superior realm of real yet immaterial entities of which the phenomena of our earthly world are imperfect imitations.

Succeeding generations of thinkers discovered that it is one thing to possess a "tradition," another to engage with Platonic texts, themselves often filled with recondite notions difficult to reconcile with traditional commonplaces. As we observe Renaissance Platonism taking shape, we should place the premodern exegetical tradition alluded to above at center stage. The interpreter, who was also a cultural translator, had to bring out the truth in Platonic writings, a truth to which Plato and his ancient followers might not have been fully privy, acting as they were as messengers, vessels, and transmitters of divine truths.[9] The story of Platonism in the Renaissance is the story of this process of interpretation, from the recovery of Plato's works, to ensuing controversy, and finally to a capstone figure, Marsilio Ficino (1433–99), who consolidated and transformed this heritage in a way that ramified and echoed for centuries thereafter.

## Plato's works

Before, I had merely met Plato; now, I believe, I know him.
(Leonardo Bruni)[10]

The recovery of Plato's works occurred together with a remarkable confluence of interest in the Hellenic world, cultural revival, and on-the-ground



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practical education in the late 1390s in the city of Florence. The advent in that city of the Byzantine diplomat Manuel Chrysoloras proved decisive for Renaissance appreciation of the Hellenic world. Induced by members of the humanist circle to whom he served as a father figure, Coluccio Salutati helped in establishing a chair for the teaching of Greek at the University of Florence.[11]

One of the young humanists who benefited from Chrysoloras' presence was Leonardo Bruni (1370–1444), who turned from the study of law to the study of Greek in 1397. Looking back on that moment in an autobiographical vein some forty years later, Bruni explained his motivation succinctly: "When you have a chance to see and converse with Homer and Plato and Demosthenes . . . will you deprive yourself of it?"[12] From Chrysoloras, Bruni learned not only the basics of Greek, but also a set of ideas that, with practice and improvement in technical detail, stood behind his translating habits for the rest of his life.[13] The most important of these ideas was the practice of translating for sense, rather than literally. The translator's key imperative was, Bruni later said, to get to know "all the lines and colors" of an author, and to reproduce in Latin the effect as well as the exact meaning of the Greek.[14] If Plato was persuasive, a writer who possessed the "utmost urbanity, the highest method of disputation, and the deepest subtlety," as Bruni wrote to his colleague in the Florentine republic of letters, Niccolò Niccoli, then the translator had to make that set of desirable qualities felt in his own Latin version.[15] Bruni made his initial effort at translating Plato at the behest of Coluccio Salutati in the first years of the fifteenth century, as Salutati was trying to come to terms with what place the ancient pagan authors should hold in modern Christian cultural life.

The dialogue Salutati urged Bruni to translate was Plato's *Phaedo*, the memorable account of Socrates' death, as Socrates, surrounded by his disciples, put their minds at ease, or at least attempted to do so. Socrates outlines the nature of the individual human soul, arguing for his belief that the individual soul is immortal; he ties this theory to the notion of *anamnesis*, or "recollection." When we realize that two things are "equal," we have, in a sense, an inborn knowledge of the Equal Itself, a form which we recollect as we learn the specific fact of the equality of two things. In fact, those two things, being equal, in a sense "participate" in the form of the Equal Itself. The form is the cause of those two things being equal, rather than the physical fact of their equality; it will not be in natural science, Socrates says, that we will find true causes (99b): "Imagine not being able to distinguish the real cause from that without which the cause would not be able to act as a cause."[16] The *Phaedo* closes with a myth: Socrates says that we humans are situated as if in a hollow, on the earth. After death, the most



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virtuous souls (that is, the true philosophers who have in life purified themselves) will find willing guides to lead them to the superior regions of the world, to dwell among gods. Those less virtuous will come back (Socrates had said earlier) as bees or wasps, if they are socially adept, for "No one may join the company of the gods who has not practiced philosophy and is not completely pure when he departs from life, no one but the lover of learning" (82a–b). The worst will be cast into the river Cocytus – to return to the end of the *Phaedo* – never to be heard from again.

These staples of what are now considered, academically, commonplaces of the Platonic tradition (immortality of the individual soul, reward and punishment after death for conduct on earth, and a form-based ontology) would have been obvious to Bruni, in the sense that they had been to Petrarch, since they formed part of the stock of Platonic commonplaces. More dangerous would have been the *Phaedo*'s treatment of a recollection-based epistemology, depending as it did on the notion that souls preexisted in the realm of the forms.

Other aspects of the *Phaedo* might have seemed more noteworthy to Bruni, not only those sections of the dialogue that pointed to Socrates as an ethical example, but also those that highlighted a consciousness of the somewhat open-ended nature of the Platonic form of inquiry. The dialogue is framed by a conversation between Echecrates and Phaedo, with Echecrates learning the events of Socrates' last day from Phaedo, who had been present. At one point, Phaedo breaks from his narration of that fateful day's conversations, and he tells Echecrates how struck he was by Socrates' conduct (88c–89a): "What I wondered at most in him was the pleasant, kind and admiring way he received the young men's argument, and how sharply he was aware of the effect the discussion had on us, and how well he healed our distress and, as it were, recalled us from our flight and defeat and turned us around to join him in the examination of their argument." During what he knew to be his last day alive, Socrates maintained his humanity, "healing" his companions' distress. He functioned as a moral exemplar, and, importantly, he demonstrated by practice an abiding faith in the power of "logos," which we might render here as "rational argument" or, to put it more Socratically, "inquiring conversation."

Echecrates then asks Phaedo how Socrates did these things, and immediately thereafter Phaedo resumes his narration of the day. Phaedo relates that Socrates' most important advice to them was that they should not become "misologues" (89d–e), or "haters of inquiring conversation," since whoever hates conversation will wind up hating humankind. The open-endedness of the dialogue form as exemplified by Plato's works must have struck Bruni here. Unless we impose anachronistic mental conditions on Plato, we must



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admit that Plato was not so concerned with transmitting systematic, internally coherent doctrines, at least not in a published format. What was important to him, instead, was living a "philosophical" way of life, so that the purpose of any given dialogue is as much to stimulate thought in the reader as it is to examine a single issue; as much to present interlocutors as moral exemplars – good, bad, and in-between – as it is to tally up their verbal arguments in search of a false coherence. This dialogical aspect of Plato's work paradoxically represented what was newest about Bruni's initial contact with the original texts of Plato. Immortality of the soul, rewards and punishments after death, a nonmaterial yet "real" world that superintends our own: these were part and parcel of Christianity. Bruni could well say, as he did in the dedication of his translation of the *Phaedo* directed to Pope Innocent VII, that the dialogue could be seen as "a confirmation of the true faith" and that Plato agreed with the true faith not only in the matter of the immortality of the human soul but "in many others as well."[17]

Christian and Platonic commonplaces were not new: what was new was the idea that the search for wisdom could be pursued – if, that is, one were not to become a "misologue" – in a way that was consonant with the tradition of learned but humane conversation that was central to Bruni's generation of humanists. This love of group dialogue and discussion, often about ethical concerns, among humanists represented a real "culture of the disputation" in Bruni's day, a culture in which thinkers rejoiced in the fact that different opinions could and should be aired by a select elite, if human souls, as Plato had it, were to be "cared for" adequately.[18] It would only be later in the fifteenth century, when more of Plato's works were recovered, that attempts would be made to use them to create a Platonic system. Also, the more Plato's works were recovered, the more he came to be seen, in some camps, as a rival to Aristotle. By the middle decades of the fifteenth century, controversy over this topic began to break out.

## Controversy

> I have hated Plato since I was a young man . . . I was seized with indignation at his ingratitude, temerity, impudence, and wicked impiety.
> (George of Trebizond, 1458)[19]

> Whether he was dealing with subjects that were divine and thus separated from matter, with natural science, ethics, religion, the state, or with the power of logical discourse or prayer or with any other thing, Plato maintained the character of a philosopher, and he never shied away from the philosopher's duty . . . For this especially is the function of one who philosophizes: the investigation and the discovery of truth. This is true philosophy. It was due to



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> the love and eagerness for investigating and discovering truth that the name "philosopher" was invented.
> (Cardinal Bessarion)[20]

The two key protagonists in the Plato–Aristotle controversy hailed from the Byzantine world. The unstable but brilliant George of Trebizond came to see Plato and the possibility of a Platonic revival as harbingers of the coming of the Antichrist; whereas the equally gifted, though temperamentally more conservative Cardinal Bessarion saw in Plato the ancient Greek philosopher closest to Christian truth, as indeed had many before him – though for the first time in the Latin West Bessarion could draw on centuries of late ancient and Byzantine commentary to make his arguments. Behind their debate lay educational traditions, the politics of Byzantine emigration to Italy, and the ongoing search by Renaissance people to delimit the boundaries of what was acceptable in current understandings of Christianity.[21]

As to educational traditions, there was no viable possibility for anyone in the Renaissance to present Platonism as a rival to Aristotelianism. Even in late antiquity, the heyday of what Friedrich Schleiermacher called "Neoplatonism," it was understood, by thinkers like Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus, and later Proclus, that one began with Aristotle. Aristotle's writings, based on lecture notes, were systematic, organized, and hence teachable. Only after thoroughly learning Aristotle could one graduate to Plato's teachings, since only then would one possess the philosophical armature on which to hang the diverse and contradictory doctrines found in Plato's writings. Even before the "Neoplatonists," Plato's dialogues had been deemed a unitary corpus that could be taught, as one can see from the imagery of the middle Platonist Albinos (active around AD 150), as he suggested that Plato's dialogues should be read as if in a circle.[22] They and others believed, probably rightly, that Plato had taught a set of "unwritten doctrines" in the Academy.[23] Still, the dialogues were what Plato had chosen to make public, and they demanded the kind of interpretive reading that simply was not possible to include in an elementary curriculum.

Later Platonism, from the period of the middle Platonists through the Neoplatonists, in one sense represented a scholastic phase in the history of the reception of Plato, since thinkers then tried to make systematic precisely what was unsystematic, Plato's dialogues, using a small group of core texts as a basis for interpreting the rest. All of them had Aristotle as primary background. It is a telling fact that the most important introduction to Aristotle's *Categories* (one of his six foundational logical works) was written by Porphyry, Plotinus' student, editor, and biographer.[24] It is no less important that the preponderance of late ancient Platonists and a number of other commentators did not believe that Plato and Aristotle disagreed



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fundamentally. It is not that their philosophies were by any means thought to be identical; rather, it was seen to be the interpreter's task to philosophize creatively enough that he might find their true harmony, to understand that, were we to grasp their meaning correctly, the two philosophers spoke with one voice, in *symphonia*, even though they might disagree on some very important particulars.[25]

When Aristotle's works were rediscovered and made available to Western thinkers in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, a similar process ensued. Just as late ancient thinkers had used Aristotle as the basis for understanding the more mysterious and notionally more sublime Plato, so too did high medieval Western scholastic thinkers use Aristotle to understand the mysteries of Christianity. Philosophy, the handmaiden of theology, meant Aristotelian philosophy. It formed an important, constitutive element of the arts faculty in many medieval universities. After passing through the arts faculty, one would then graduate and enter, should one so choose, the "higher" faculties of medicine, theology, or law, all of which assumed as prerequisites a mastery of the basic scholastic tools of reasoning and a thorough grounding in the work of the "master of those who know," Aristotle, as well as in the commentaries which had grown up around his work.[26] By the time of the Renaissance, these educational traditions had become inseparable from the idea of the university, even as the number of European universities was sharply on the rise, going from eighteen in the year 1300 to approximately sixty in the year 1500.[27] Anyone who has had experience in the field of higher education will realize an important fact: these institutions not only of education but also of social reproduction were unlikely to undergo farreaching changes in a short amount of time. And indeed they did not. Platonism in the Renaissance remained a movement and a philosophical stance that, with few exceptions, could only succeed outside of universities.[28]

In the Byzantine world, matters had proceeded differently. The Byzantine elite had not lost contact with the works of either Plato or Aristotle, and by the time of Michael Psellos (*c.* 1018 – *c.* 1081) and his students John Italos and Michael of Ephesus, wide-ranging bodies of scholarship had grown up around Plato and Aristotle that continued to evolve over the next centuries. As ever, Aristotle was considered the basic, elementary philosopher. Yet by the end of the fourteenth century, two factors contributed to an environment in which it began to seem desirable to compare Plato and Aristotle. First, it had become clear to Byzantine intellectuals that Western thinkers, especially Aquinas, had achieved great system-building successes by taking Aristotle as the starting point. Though divided by doctrine from the Latin Christian West, Byzantine thinkers sought the same sort of intellectual legitimacy for Greek Orthodox theology that Western scholastic philosophers had



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provided for the West.[29] Second, other anxieties were on the rise in the Byzantine world. It was becoming clear with every passing year that the Turks represented an ever-increasing threat. Chrysoloras, the Byzantine diplomat mentioned above and the West's first great Renaissance teacher of Greek, had as part of his mission to enlist the West's support of Byzantium. Given the sense of crisis, some Byzantine thinkers began to feel that the Greeks had lost their way. One especially, Gemistus Pletho, advocated, if not a return to the pagan Hellenic past, at least a more mature reflection on the nature of Hellenic monotheism.[30] He endorsed a return to the roots of Hellenic culture, and he identified those roots with Platonism and a broadened cult of the gods, not so dissimilar after all to the cult of the saints, but more explicit in its frank acknowledgment that, for most people, multiple outlets for contact with the divine have always been necessary, even those who believe in the existence of one supreme being.[31] In this last respect, Pletho's monotheistic but immanently divine Platonism was shaped by late ancient traditions of commentary that had arisen over the last millennium.

Western thinkers came into contact with these Byzantine traditions in two ways in the early fifteenth century. First, after Chrysoloras a number of Western thinkers went east, learning Greek in Byzantium, and returning home laden with Greek manuscripts acquired by means licit and less so. Francesco Filelfo and Giovanni Aurispa represent two of the best known of these figures.[32] Second, at least as important was the Council of Ferrara–Florence in 1438–9, the last attempt (as it turned out) to unify the Eastern and Western Christian churches.[33] One Western observer recorded that when he found himself in the presence of the learned Greeks at the Council, it seemed he was back in Plato's Academy or Aristotle's Lyceum, so great was the learning and eloquence of the Council's Greek guests.[34] Pletho himself was present at the Council, and he remained a defender of the Greek Orthodox Church, which he believed the closest to true Christianity, despite his neo-paganizing leanings.

The Council served to make Platonism appealing to Western thinkers for a variety of reasons. The eloquence of thinkers to whom Plato's texts had been known for centuries made Plato shine more brightly; Bessarion, then a member of the Byzantine legation with the title of "orator" (in effect, "ambassador") made an eloquent spokesperson for Plato; and Pletho himself inspired Western interest in Platonism, at the least by giving a manuscript of Platonic works in Greek to Cosimo de' Medici. Pletho also lectured on the differences between Plato and Aristotle (favoring Plato), and wrote a treatise on the topic. Though the treatise does not seem to have circulated widely, it had enough effect to inspire a counter-attack from another Byzantine intellectual, George Scholarios. These debates echoed in the polemics between George of Trebizond, especially



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in his *Comparatio philosophorum Platonis et Aristotelis* ("A Comparison of the Philosophers Plato and Aristotle") and Cardinal Bessarion, in his *In calumniatorem Platonis* ("Against the Vilifier of Plato").[35] In general terms, each side presented the opposing philosopher as deficient with respect to Christian morality and dogma. Plato was painted as advocating pedophilia, the common ownership of wives, and the transmigration of souls (the latter notion implied their preexistence and was thus heretical); Aristotle as arguing that the world was eternal (a heresy since God was supposed to have created it *ex nihilo*), and that the individual human soul was mortal.

In any case, one of the most fruitful aspects of the cultural interchange between East and West was the greater availability of Greek manuscripts. Not only Plato's dialogues but also a host of other relevant interpretive material made its way into these manuscripts, including works of Plotinus, Porphyry, and Iamblichus, and the *Hermetic Corpus*.

## Marsilio Ficino

> Plato, the father of philosophers . . . considered it just and pious that, as the human mind receives everything from God, so it should restore everything to God . . .. Whatever subject he deals with, be it ethics, dialectic, mathematics or physics, he quickly brings it round, in a spirit of utmost piety, to the contemplation and worship of God.[36]
> (Marsilio Ficino)

The Plato–Aristotle controversy, especially as it manifested itself among Byzantine émigrés, represented as much a struggle among personalities for patronage and prestige as it did a philosophical conflict. Yet it would be a mistake to reduce the controversy to a patronage game, and an equally damaging mistake to forget that from late antiquity onward, most Platonically oriented thinkers believed that it was necessary to study Aristotle first before moving on to the truths hidden in Plato's writings "beneath the outer shell," or *sub cortice*, as so many thinkers expressed it. As the Plato–Aristotle controversy was in play in and around the environment of the papal court, in Florence, the most important Renaissance Platonist, Marsilio Ficino (1433–99), accomplished the most for the Renaissance study of Platonism, for the most part steering clear of controversy. He provided authoritative Latin translations and commentaries on Plato's dialogues, wrote a major synthetic work with Platonism as its centerpiece, and through a Europe-wide correspondence network created enthusiasm for his style of Platonism.[37]

To understand Ficino's style of Platonism, two factors should be foregrounded: first, that he was the son of a doctor, had medical training, and



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considered himself a doctor; and second that, at least from 1473 onward, he was an ordained Catholic priest, who considered everything he did to be in the service of Christianity. Ficino in his medical and priestly aspect first of all saw a society around him that needed healing. After a fractious decade in the 1450s, with an averted anti-Medici conspiracy among other problems overcome, the time seemed right for just such a person. The Medici supported a variety of cultural orientations through their lavish patronage, from Aristotelian philosophy at the Florentine University, revived in 1473, to the careers of vernacular poets.[38] Still, for a time, Ficino had the ear of Florence's civic leaders, especially of Cosimo de' Medici, who asked that Ficino read to him certain newly translated dialogues of Plato as he was dying.[39] One of Ficino's most consistent lifelong emphases was a concern for educating the elites, the men he believed to be society's natural leaders.[40] After Cosimo's death in 1464, Ficino continued to associate himself with civic leaders, and this impulse toward education expressed itself in two prominent ways. First, Ficino maintained throughout his life a far-flung correspondence network, writing like many Renaissance figures semi-public letters, later to collect them into individual books suitable for dedication to patrons. Ficino corresponded with Florentine leaders like Lorenzo de' Medici; princes of the Church, like Bessarion who after converting to Roman Catholicism became a cardinal; foreign leaders and patrons, like Matthias "Corvinus" Hunyadi, king of Hungary from 1458 to 1490; as well as fellow scholars and friends, like Angelo Poliziano, Cristoforo Landino, and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola.[41]

Second, Ficino was an active educator on the local level. He taught only a short time at the Florentine *studio* or university, and precisely what he taught is uncertain.[42] Yet he did teach, often in the Camaldolese church of Santa Maria degli Angeli.[43] In a letter to a German correspondent, Ficino went through a catalog of his friends, among whom he included: first, patrons; second, "familiar friends – fellow conversationalists, so to speak"; and third, *auditores* or "students."[44] Among the people listed, we find some of Florence's most prominent citizens, from various members of the Medici family, to Cristoforo Landino, Benedetto Accolti, and Giorgio Antonio Vespucci (a relative of the famous explorer), and Niccolò Valori, Carlo Marsuppini, and Bindaccio dei Ricasoli, among a number of others.[45]

Ficino's modesty in describing his teaching activities to his German friend is striking, and it is apparent from reading this letter why he appealed to so many people. When describing the second category, for example, he says that if the people he lists are "almost pupils [*discipuli*], still, they aren't really pupils, since I wouldn't want to imply that I had taught or am teaching any of them, but rather, in a Socratic fashion, I ask them all questions and



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encourage them, and I persistently call forth the fertile geniuses of my friends to bring about birth."[46] Ficino saw his teaching in the classic Socratic manner as midwifery of knowledge, an image made famous in Plato's *Theaetetus*. This loose sort of intellectually fertile association among presumed social equals recalls the "culture of the disputation" so popular also with Bruni's generation, and it reminds us why Plato's dialogues remained so popular among learned elites. The final category, he says, "are in the order of students," and we can presume that he had some formal responsibility for their elementary education.[47]

The Platonic "Academy" traditionally associated with Ficino (though notoriously difficult to document) represented in an ideal sense a real phenomenon, but it was one in accord with contemporary meanings familiar to Ficino.[48] Plato's dialogues themselves could be referred to as an "academy," rich with precious teachings as they were; an "academy" could be a private school organized to teach youths, though not necessarily located in one specific place; and the word "academy" could refer to "any regular gathering of literary men."[49] Ficino's "academy" seems to have been more associated with the first two meanings of the word. Rather than leading a regular gathering in a specific place, Ficino preferred to teach Florence's elite youth when he could and, as a Socratic, philosophical friend, to try as best he might to draw out of his associates the better part of their natures in conversation.

Through his medical training and background he would have had exposure to Aristotelian philosophical traditions, which included not only argumentation but also style of writing. With respect to style, by Ficino's day the gold standard for humanist prose was basically Ciceronian Latin. Ficino, however, never employed cultivated humanist Latin, partially because of his early education, partially by choice.[50] Though he does employ scholastic formulations, he does not sound like a scholastic philosopher, shunning for the most part the "question" and "commentary" formats. He developed, in short, an independent Latin style, suitable for recreating "in Latin what Plotinus had achieved in his Greek: that is, to approach sublimity in an unadorned and apparently artless way that is nonetheless syntactically and rhetorically challenging."[51]

His medical training, in addition to creating a certain independence of style, also made Ficino sensitive on a basic level to the problem of the physical: that is, he had an instinctive understanding of the fact that, as human beings, we are – regrettably perhaps, from a Platonic point of view – embedded in and affected by matter.[52] One of his most lasting and influential works, his *De triplici vita* ("On the triple life") offered recipes, rituals (astrological and otherwise), and contemplative practices all toward the end of helping those of a scholarly temperament stay healthy.[53] Throughout the



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work's three books, written separately but printed and published together in 1489, barely a page goes by without Ficino's observation of some physical fact, whether the effect of certain herbs on a person's constitution, the right time of day to rise, or, in one noteworthy section, the effects of drinking human blood on a senior citizen.[54] Ficino's Platonism was not, in short, the Platonism of the nineteenth century: mentalistic, divorced from the body, with ethics and the realities of everyday life decidedly in second place to metaphysics. Moreover, the late ancient Platonists Ficino investigated with ever-increasing intensity in the 1480s and 1490s seemed to confirm many of his ritualistic tendencies and his fascination with the physical. Ficino's synoptic style of Platonism needs to be explained taking a long view of the history of Platonism, one that includes the significant changes that Platonism underwent in late antiquity.[55]

Plotinus (AD 204–70) seems in retrospect the most mentalistic of all late ancient Platonists. That is, he stressed pure contemplation as the way to achieve union with the divine; given this advocacy of the mind's power, Plotinus believed that a true philosopher need not be concerned with ritual practices.[56] After Plotinus, however, most Platonists came to believe that all people, philosophers included, could and should use rituals, physical though they sometimes were. Most Platonists after Plotinus saw him as a new beginning, a thinker so brilliant that he gave new direction, impetus, and comprehensiveness to philosophy. Still, they departed from him on the matter of the use of rituals by philosophers. As late ancient Christianity adopted, transformed, and essentially evolved in synchrony with certain Platonic notions, the most salient of these had precisely to do with rituals. Specifically, St. Augustine (354–430) adopted the idea – in his battles against the Donatists – that sacraments, the site of Catholic ritual and the way that the divine was channeled, functioned, as he put it, *ex opere operato*, or "from the work having been worked" – in short by the proper use and practice of rituals. While one would not find detailed discussions of rituals in Plato's dialogues, one did find such discussions in later Platonic works. It must have struck Ficino as significant that, though some of the newly discovered later Platonic thinkers, especially Porphyry (*c.* 233 – *c.* 309), Iamblichus (*c.* 242 – *c.* 347), and Proclus (*c.* 411–85), were historically anti-Christian, they nonetheless seemed in their writings to be advocating ritual practices that were similar in their basic assumptions to Christian sacramental practices.

It was for this reason – the seeming family resemblance among so many types of late ancient wisdom literature (as we can term texts from Plotinus' *Enneads* to the *Hermetic Corpus*, Augustine's *City of God* to Proclus' *Platonic Theology*) – that Ficino endorsed one of his most enduring



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contributions to Renaissance Platonism: the "ancient theology," or *prisca theologia*. This concept is the only element of Ficino's thought through which one can find in him any sense of consistency, and, as the tree of Platonism ramified after him, it is the facet that remained most important. Ficino came to believe that there was one larger truth that infused, formed, and guided the history of real human wisdom. Representing true Christianity, this truth was also found in pre-Christian and even non-Christian thinkers, a progressive revelation over time, given only to those select few whom God chose. One of the most important of these ancients was Hermes "Thrice Great," or "Trismegistus," an Egyptian sage who was believed to have been active only a few generations removed from the time of Moses, but whose works we now know to have been products of late ancient syncretism not far removed from the time of Plotinus.[57] Tellingly, it was the Platonist Iamblichus, two generations removed from Plotinus, who was the first Platonist to adopt the *Hermetic Corpus* into Platonic philosophy, even as he was the first self-proclaimed Platonic philosopher fully to embrace the late ancient ritual-oriented mode of thought alluded to above. Iamblichus' surviving works were among the earliest Platonic works that Ficino translated into Latin.[58]

Regarding Hermes, whom Ficino terms "Mercurius," using the Latin equivalent, here is how Ficino put it in the preface to his translation of the *Hermetic Corpus*:

> Among philosophers he first turned from physical and mathematical topics to contemplation of things divine, and he was the first to discuss with great wisdom the majesty of God, the order of demons, and the transformations of souls. Thus, he was called the first author of theology, and Orpheus followed him, taking second place in the ancient theology. After Aglaophemus, Pythagoras came next in theological succession, having been initiated into the rites of Orpheus, and he was followed by Philolaus, teacher of our divine Plato. In this way, from a wondrous line of six theologians emerged a single system of ancient theology, harmonious in every part.[59]

Ficino is not outwardly consistent in his rendering of the succession of ancient theologians, all of whom contributed to the history of true philosophy's evolution: his ordering changes intermittently, other figures are added on occasion, and so on.[60] Indeed, after 1469, after the first blush of his encounter with the *Hermetic Corpus*, Ficino added Zoroaster to the list, giving him thenceforth priority and associating him with the *Chaldean Oracles* and the ancient Magi whose heirs would visit the infant Christ.[61] The underlying message of the ancient theology, however, is consistent: it is only through an active, imaginative reconstruction of the past that the



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Platonic philosopher can help heal the society in which he finds himself. From the quoted passage we can also observe that Ficino – like other humanists before him, though with a decidedly different emphasis – believed intensely that philosophy needed to become more pluralistic: that is, true philosophers needed to learn to include within philosophy's purview source material that fell outside of the university canon, even as true philosophers needed to embrace many branches of learning to make their métier one worth practicing.[62] As Ficino's contemporary and friendly rival Angelo Poliziano put it as he was about to teach a course on Aristotle's *Prior Analytics* in 1492, "Philosophy presses her favors on those who are awake, not on those who are asleep."[63]

Besides his incarnation, for a time, of the Platonic philosopher as *medicus animarum* or "doctor of souls," whereby Ficino embodied the persona of "the ecstatic, the prophet," he also set out, in his *Platonic Theology, On the Immortality of Souls*, to create a Platonic *summa* for his time.[64] This complex work represented at once a gathering together of many of Ficino's ideas, familiar from his letters, and an attempt to order them in a coherent, if not synthetic manner. The work, structured in eighteen books, is unique in the history of premodern philosophy. Though Ficino is indebted to scholasticism neither in format nor in Latinity, he nonetheless uses scholastic concepts; by no means un-Christian, Ficino employs as source material historically anti-Christian thinkers like Proclus; and, noteworthy for the Renaissance's greatest Platonist, Ficino is heavily indebted to the Middle Ages' greatest Aristotelian, Thomas Aquinas (1224/6–74), especially in the use Ficino makes of Aquinas' *Summa contra gentiles*. Ficino wrote the work after he had drafted his complete translation of Plato, and in it we can observe a number of features of Ficino's own particular Platonism.

Perhaps the most prominent is the presence of ontological hierarchy, the notion that there exist in the universe grades of being, from low to high and high to low, which the committed metaphysician can access, describe, and use as the basis for further philosophical reflection. Ficino would have been pleased to admit his debt to later Platonism on this score, especially to the thought of Plotinus, since Ficino believed he was adding to an already existing core of truth. For Plotinus, discussion of ontology – had he written systematically – would have begun with his notion of The One, the highest ontological principle, so high, indeed, that it stood above being. The One – great, ineffable, reserved as it seemed, a sort of hyper-charged version of Plato's Form of the Good grafted onto Aristotle's Prime Mover – produces the levels below it; it "overflows ... and its superabundance makes something other than itself" (*Enneads*, 5.2.1). Underneath The One, there stood Mind (which possessed being), which then overflowed



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into Soul, which itself finally overflowed into the final realm, which included and gave rise to nature, matter, and sensation. Plotinus speaks of these levels in different places and in different ways in his *Enneads*, and Ficino's interpretation of this ontological schema is similarly diverse throughout his body of work.[65] However, in the *Platonic Theology*, especially in the first four books, Ficino sets out an ontological scheme that is as ingenious as it is unique.

Ficino's first principle is God. Behind his conception of God stood two powerful traditions, one Platonic–Christian, the other Christian. The Platonic–Christian tradition reached back to early Christian "negative" theology: the idea that God was so great that we human beings – limited, imperfect, and embodied as we are – could never know him fully and positively, yet we could know what he was not. This apophatic tradition reached back to the letters of the Apostle Paul and was refracted by and through St. Augustine's magnified and absolute view of God's omnipotence. The *Divine Names* of Dionysius the Areopagite (Pseudo) also proved an important touchstone in this regard. A host of medieval mystics from Meister Eckhart on through Ficino's contemporary on the threshold of modernity, Nicholas of Cusa (1401–64), were inspired by this style of thought. Cardinal Cusa, well in line with this "negative" tradition, suggested that the highest state of human wisdom might well be a "learned ignorance," a state of satisfaction which allowed us to acknowledge the deity but which had inevitably built into it a dissatisfaction that could only be fulfilled and satisfied when we managed to find communion with that deity.[66] This "negative" tradition was also obviously Platonic, having affinities as it did with Plotinus's conception of the unreachable, ineffable One (above Being and as such out of the realm of the language of Being) and having as well a distant ancestor in Plato's cave imagery from the *Republic*.[67]

Ficino's conception of God, atop the ontological hierarchy, also possesses a distinctly Christian dimension. Ficino's God is not a terrifyingly unknowable, Heideggerian *Sein* ("Being"), but a generous, caring God, who provided the natural, physical world for us human beings curiously to learn, eventually to know, and ultimately to use for our and others' benefit. A God such as this would not have created us, always in a condition of longing for him, without having endowed us with an immortal soul; had we not an immortal soul, no creature would be more miserable than man. God himself, like Plotinus' One, emanated down to the next level, which Ficino termed Angelic Mind, which itself overflowed into the level of Rational Soul – in which we human beings took part – which then overflowed into Ficino's own addition to the ontological hierarchy, "Quality," ending up, finally, in the fifth and lowest ontological level, matter.[68]



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On the one hand, Ficino's addition of Quality to the ontological hierarchy allows Rational Soul, which he at times identifies with humanity or human soul, to stand in the middle of the universe of Being: humanity becomes, as such, the *vinculum* or link between the earthly and the divine. In this respect, the "dignity of humankind," often asserted as a central element of Italian Renaissance thought, finds a philosophical grounding and foundation in Ficino's thought.[69] On the other hand, Quality is more than a placeholder in Ficino's hierarchy, an extra element added simply to place humanity at the center of the universe. Quality is also the superior shadow-side of Matter, that element which, unlike Matter, is divisible across different forms and physical manifestations, a kind of ontological glue allowing God's immanence to manifest itself in a way accessible and approachable by human beings.[70] Below the level of Quality in Ficino's hierarchy stands Matter, that element which, it is true, has fallen farthest away from its divine origins but which also contains within it the seeds that, when properly discovered, humbly nourished, and philosophically used, can help human beings immeasurably in their quest to return to the divine.[71]

Like a number of medieval and Renaissance philosophers, Ficino believed that, in each major category of being, there existed a *primum*, or "first" – a member of that category that was noblest, strongest, and most fecund.[72] As Ficino wrote: "For the primary member of any genus is the principle of the whole genus. What is the principle of other things contains all that follow upon it. So what is first in its genus lacks nothing of its genus."[73] The other members of the category approached the first member's dignity but could not reach it in degree of perfection. Even so, they were created in the image of that first element and had implanted in them that element's perfection as a goal toward which they must inevitably strive with an *appetitus naturalis*, or "natural desire." The notion of the *primum* pervades his various writings, and along with his firm belief in the *prisca theologia*, it gives his philosophical stance a unity that, at first glance, it might seem to lack.

Ficino's contribution to the history of metaphysics was complemented by his theory of love, which straddled the boundary between the metaphysical and the physical. Indeed, those categories, though they would of course have been familiar to Ficino as basic school divisions of philosophy, can sometimes be misleading to modern interpreters. For, to Ficino, the boundary between the physical and the metaphysical was more porous than post-Cartesian moderns might assume. Ficino did not theorize the human soul as Descartes did the "mind," that is, as something, as Descartes famously wrote in his *Meditations*, that was "without extension" but substantially real and formally individual nonetheless.[74] That kind of mind–body dualism did not exist in the premodern world, neither in the thought of Plato himself,



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nor in the late ancient and medieval Platonic tradition, both pagan and Christian, nor in Ficino's thought.[75]

Instead, for Ficino as for most of his premodern contemporaries, the soul was an immaterial entity deeply bound up with the body and its physical nature. Soul represented a spiritual power that exercised physical functions focused in various parts of the body, and it did so via a fine material substance, *spiritus*, or "spirit."[76] Like all Platonists, Ficino believed that the ultimate goal of a human being was psychological purification, part of which entailed liberating the soul from the material prison in which it was confined. However, Ficino like all Christians would also have believed in the resurrection of the body, a notion whose guiding leitmotif held that, ultimately, at the end of time and when God's providence so decreed, the soul of the saved person would be reunited, not with a metaphorical, but with a real physical body.[77]

All of this helps explain why Ficino's theory of love was so important in enabling his own style of Platonism to reach out into the realms of literature and art. One of Ficino's early works, his *Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love* (written toward the end of the 1460s and in effect an independent philosophical dialogue rather than a formal commentary), helped make his ideas on love, collectively, one of his most lasting legacies.[78] One of the "ancient theologians" whom Ficino most revered was Orpheus, and Ficino possessed, as did late ancient Platonists, a set of works known as the *Orphic Hymns*.[79] For Ficino, Orpheus represented not only the author of those hymns but also the philosophically therapeutic use of music; and at the very beginning of his treatise on love, Ficino wrote to the treatise's dedicatee that it was from Orpheus that he "had learned that love exists, and that it holds the keys to the whole world."[80] The practice of music and the singing of hymns prepare the human soul to receive and then to act in consonance with the love that binds the universe, that makes the planets sing, that makes cities function well and people care properly for one another. It is love, for Ficino, that implants in all living things the desire to propagate.[81] It is love which, through a system of universal linkages known as "sympathies" – mutual but sometimes occult attractions – unites the earthly with the heavenly; and it is love which acts as "a magician," Ficino states, "because the whole power of magic consists in love. The work of magic is the attraction of one thing by another by way of a certain affinity of nature."[82]

The magical affinities of which Ficino speaks in the foregoing passage are, on the one hand, naturally present and, on the other, mediated on many levels by what he terms *spiritus*, or "spirit." "Spirit," Ficino writes, "is defined by doctors as a vapor of blood – pure, subtle, hot, and clear. After being generated by the heat of the heart out of the more subtle blood, it flies



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to the brain; and there the soul uses it continually for the exercise of the interior as well as the exterior senses."[83] Elsewhere he writes that "since it is closely akin to the soul, the soul has no difficulty in entering into this spirit and first permeates the whole of it, and then with it as a mean it totally permeates the whole body."[84] Spirit is light, as opposed to heavy, having more to do with the elements water and air than with earth. Spirit pervades the universe, from the celestial to the human, and it is the primary mediating factor that allows universal love to express itself, from the cosmic level down to the human. "What doubt will occur to anyone," Ficino writes in his *On Love*, "that love is inborn in all things toward all things?"[85]

When a lover loves the beloved, part of his *spiritus* goes out to the beloved; should that love be unreciprocated, a variety of homicide ensues, as the essential element of *spiritus* is stolen from the beloved, unable to be replenished. Still, for Ficino, physical attractions – provided one has conditioned and cared for the soul correctly – can lead to higher, more divine attractions: true love is enjoyment of pleasure, and true pleasure is not rooted in the senses but in the mind. The enjoyment of pleasure takes shape in the love of true beauty, a beauty that is beyond our world, and yet that process is begun by earthly love.

## After Ficino

Owing to its general appeal and the ability it afforded learned elites to graft a new, fashionably classicizing Platonism onto a medieval courtly love tradition that had never died, Ficino's version of Platonic love proved influential in the Italian literature of the next century.[86] Yet there was a more specific reason for this transformation as well. Ficino's student Francesco da Diacceto (named in Ficino's letter listing his students) wrote an approachable treatise in the vernacular, also titled *On Love*.[87] Though Ficino's *Symposium Commentary* had been turned into the vernacular early on, it remained in a certain sense a work for initiates. Diacceto's *On Love*, on the other hand, made the theories more systematic. At the outset of his work, he expressed anxiety about treating "the profound mysteries of love" in the vernacular, since doing so could have the effect of communicating "divine matters to the mob," though they are not qualified to receive them. In the end, he decides to reveal the mysteries of love precisely so that people will know that it is the higher sort of love that is humankind's most desirable end.[88] Diacceto was a member of two different literary associations, the "Rucellai Gardens" and the "Sacred Academy of the Medici" (Michelangelo himself was a member of the latter association); and Diacceto was also a teacher of moral philosophy as well as Greek and Latin at the Florentine University.[89] Through both of



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these functions, as an independent intellectual in the world of the literary sodalities and as a university instructor, he would have been able to influence a number of contemporaries.

Moreover, as Diacceto was writing, a crucial transformation in Italian learned culture was occurring. The move to the vernacular for major intellectual projects and the search for an appropriately dignified form of the vernacular meant, together, that a written work's perceived level of Italian style could contribute as much to its diffusion as its content. It is thus no surprise that Baldassare Castiglione, one of the two most famous literary exponents of Platonic love, deemed Diacceto's Italian an excellent example of the style of polished Tuscan that was emerging as the standard for written Italian.[90] One of the great theorists of the vernacular, Pietro Bembo, had expressed strongly Platonic themes in his work the *Asolani*.[91] And Bembo appears as the chief Platonizing interlocutor in Castiglione's classic *The Courtier*.[92]

The fact that relatively advanced Platonic notions could be incorporated in literary works tells us that by the early sixteenth century Renaissance Platonism had reached a kind of maturity. Plato's dialogues had been recovered and translated into Latin, the late ancient Platonists had also been recovered, and serious thought had been given to the problem of integrating all of this new material into a Christian context. Ficino's guiding idea that there existed a unity of truth associated with Platonism gave rise to other attempts to investigate this perceived unity in some seemingly unlikely environments. One of these was the Augustinian order, whose members, some of whom are today little known, studied intensively even an explicitly anti-Christian Platonist like Proclus. Later in the sixteenth century, one of their members, Agostino Steuco (1496–1549), gave a definitive voice to the Ficinian tradition by writing a work entitled *On Perennial Philosophy*.[93] It promised to show the general and singular wisdom inherent in all philosophy, "to regard," he wrote, using a Greek phrase in his prefatory letter to Pope Paul III, "and to serve God."[94] As he suggested at the beginning of the work proper, "Reason, as well as the proofs of many races and of much literature, bear witness to the fact that there is one principle of all things and that there has been as such one and the same knowledge about it among all men."[95] In support of his claims, he expanded Ficino's idea of an "ancient theology" and gave voice to a hope to find a concord in all philosophical systems by peeling away the exterior shell to peer beneath into the core of truth underneath. This powerful and seductive idea proved influential in early modern Europe, and it gained its most widespread later fame when Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz employed it in a letter of 1714.[96]

As Ficino's style of Platonism passed to the north of Europe, certain key ideas continued to influence important thinkers. One of these was the



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Oxford scholar John Colet; and the most noteworthy ideas to govern his thought seem, in retrospect, the close alliance between Platonism and Christianity and concomitantly the sort of "care of the soul" in which the Platonic-Christian thinker should engage in order to practice philosophy correctly. For Colet believed, much as did Ficino, that it was prayer and meditation, not erudition, that would properly ready the soul to accept the mysteries of Christian truth, and a host of late ancient Platonists believed that purgation of the soul was necessary to make it ready to understand divine truth. Colet corresponded briefly with Ficino, and, like Ficino, he considered the letters of St. Paul an especially important source, one whose message was to be unearthed by the properly prepared exegete.[97]

In France, Platonism, again in the sixteenth century, took hold among diverse authors. Symphorien Champier (*c.* 1472–1539) shared the propensity in Ficinian Platonism to find a (sometimes occult) unity in all philosophies that needed to be brought out by the astute interpreter. Even as Champier criticized the occult arts in his early writings, he came in his vernacular works to embrace Ficinian Platonic love theory.[98] Maurice Scève (1501–64), like Champier from the Lyonnais, also carried forward Platonic love theory in a Petrarchist key in his *Délie, Object of the Highest Virtue* (1544); and in his 1562 work, *Microcosme*, he reflected the loosely Platonic inclination to see the natural world as a reflected image of the divine.[99] Other authors, such as Joachim du Bellay (*c.* 1522–60) and Pierre de Ronsard (1524–85), joined a Petrarchist poetic predisposition to Platonic theories of love, themselves mediated as much by Ficino's celebrated *Symposium* as they were by vernacular transmitters like Bembo and Castiglione.[100]

By the late sixteenth century, however, new tendencies were in the air. A rising current of naturalism helped to make Platonism into one among many schools of philosophy from which one might choose. This development was spurred partially by the rise of the new science but even more by the desire to transcend the ancients, once a relatively full textual patrimony had been recovered. Many thinkers continued, even into modern times, to be attracted by the notion of a synthetic, syncretic, but ultimately unitary "ancient theology," but voices of criticism were increasingly raised as well.[101] None was more powerful, perhaps, than that of Isaac Casaubon (1559–1614), who proved that the *Hermetic Corpus* was not the product of earliest Egyptian antiquity but rather a set of late ancient esoteric texts, sharing a philosophical milieu with thinkers like Porphyry and Iamblichus.[102] For Ficino as for many of his adherents one of the strongest proofs for the existence of a foundationally Platonic "ancient theology" had consisted, indeed, in the reputation of these enigmatic texts. A death blow was dealt to the syncretic style of Platonism when it was condemned in harsh terms by the first



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"modern" historian of philosophy, Jakob Brucker, who in his *Critical History of Philosophy* denounced the esoteric brand of Platonism as a confused hodge-podge of ill-digested ideas harmful to the progress of true, "rational" philosophy.[103]

At the same time, a fundamental change had occurred in philosophy's progress: natural philosophy (what became natural science) had been separated more or less definitively from philosophy as a whole, and the purview of philosophy as such became more restricted.[104] Out of the remains of a wide-ranging field of intellectual endeavor in which the secrets of living well were thought to reside, an academic discipline emerged. Its practitioners increasingly preoccupied themselves with questions related to the acquisition of certain human knowledge in a world dominated by the empirical claims of natural science, and eventually philosophy's purview narrowed, restricting itself to an academic field in which minds are taught how to become agile but souls are no longer taught how to become whole.

## NOTES

1. I would like to thank Michael J. B. Allen, Anna H. Celenza, James Hankins, and Pamela Zinn for helpful input.
2. Petrarch, *De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia* in Petrarca 2003, 327.
3. Augustine, *De civitate dei* 8.9.
4. Celenza 2005, 488–91.
5. Lines 2006a, 327–46.
6. On the rise of the tract, see Hobbins 2003, 1308–37.
7. Possibly Plato (MS): see Pellegrin 1969, 57. For Petrarch's knowledge of Greek authors see De Nolhac 1965, 318–68; both cited in Cortesi 1992, 458, n. 5.
8. On medieval Platonism, see Hankins 2003–4, II: 7–6, and the bibliography there at 24–6; Gersh 1986; Marenbon 2000, esp. studies XII and XV; for an edition of the Moerbeke translation see Proclus 1953.
9. For this style of interpretation, see Hadot 1995.
10. Bruni 1741, Ep. I.1, cited and translated in Hankins 1990a, I: 42 and n. 27.
11. On Chrysoloras see, in addition to Cortesi 1992, Cammelli 1941.
12. Bruni 1926, 341–2, tr. G. Griffiths in Bruni 1987, 23–4, cited by Hankins 1990a, I: 30.
13. Hankins 1990a, I: 40–8; Hankins 2003–4, I: 243–71; Cortesi 1992, 470–84; Celenza 1997, 125–6; Baldassarri 2003; Botley 2004.
14. Leonardo Bruni, *De interpretatione recta*, in Bruni 1987, 220.
15. Bruni 1741, Ep. I.1, cited and translated in Hankins 1990a, 42.
16. Plato 1977 (Grube's translation).
17. Cited and translated in Hankins 1990a, 50.
18. Plato, *Phaedo*, 107c; 115b. For "culture of the disputation," see Celenza 2004, 86–8.
19. Trebizond, *Comparatio philosophorum Platonis et Aristotelis*, III.7, cited and translated in Hankins 1990a, 168.



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20. Bessarion, *In calumniatorem Platonis*, 1.4.11, in Mohler 1923–42, I: 49; on this text see Monfasani 1981 and 1983, both reprinted in Monfasani 1995, and Ruocco 2003.
21. For recent literature on the Plato–Aristotle controversy, see Monfasani 1976, 201–9; Hankins 1990a; Karamanolis 2002; Monfasani 2002, 178–202.
22. Reis 1997, 1999; Dillon 1977, 304–6.
23. Dillon 1977, 1–11.
24. See Hankins and Palmer 2007, under Porphyry.
25. Gerson 2005.
26. For Aristotle as "Master of those who know," see Dante, *Inferno* 4.131.
27. J. Verger in De Ridder-Symoens 1992–6, I: 35–67, at 45, 47, 57.
28. See Hankins 2003–4, II: 411; for exceptions, see Kraye 2002c, 363–5; and Lines 2006a, 341.
29. Papadopoulas 1974; Podskalsky 1974, 1977; Karamanolis 2002, esp. 253–8.
30. Woodhouse 1986.
31. A position such as this had been available in later Platonism from late antiquity on; see the works collected in Athanassiadi and Frede 1999, esp. the editors' introduction, 1–20.
32. Others are listed in Hankins 2003–4, I: 285, n. 17.
33. On the Council see Gill 1959 and 1964; Viti 1994.
34. Lapo da Castiglionchio the Younger, *De curiae commodis*, ed. and tr. in Celenza 1999, 153 (5.4).
35. See George of Trebizond 1523 and Bessarion, *In calumniatorem*, in Mohler 1923–42, II.
36. Ficino 2001–6, I: 9.
37. For recent literature on Ficino, see Kristeller 1987; Hankins 1990a; Allen 1998; Vasoli 1999; Allen and Rees 2002; Hankins 2003–4, II, and the serial bibliographies in the journal *Academia* 2 (2000) and subsequent issues.
38. Hankins 2003–4, II: 273–316.
39. Ficino, *Praefatio in Xenocratis librum de morte*, in Ficino 1959, 1965.
40. Allen 1998, esp. 149–93.
41. Ficino's twelve books of letters are in Ficino 1959, 607–964; book I is available in a critical edition (Ficino 1990), and the sixteenth-century Italian translation of Felice Figliucci is available in Ficino 2001; for an English translation see Ficino 1975–2003.
42. See Davies 1992.
43. Ficino's extensive connections with Santa Maria degli Angeli are explored in Lackner 2002.
44. Ficino 1959, 936–7.
45. Ibid., 936–7.
46. Ibid., 936.
47. Ibid., 937.
48. For the debate concerning the Platonic Academy, see chapter 2, above.
49. Hankins 2003–4, II: 224; Hankins discusses and documents the various meanings of the word in ibid., 194–210 and 223–5.
50. See Hankins 1990a, I: 269–70.
51. M. J. B. Allen in Ficino 2001–6, I: ix.
52. See Celenza 2002.



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53. Ficino 1988 and chapter 8 in this volume.
54. Ficino 1988, 197 (2.11); see Celenza 2004, 100–14.
55. See Allen 1998, 51–92; Celenza 2002.
56. This paragraph is based on Celenza 2002.
57. On Hermes Trismegistus, see Copenhaver 1992, Introduction.
58. On Ficino's early translations of Iamblichus, see Gentile 1990 and Hankins and Palmer 2007.
59. Ficino 1959, 1836; cited and translated in Copenhaver and Schmitt 1992, 147.
60. Another key listing is contained in Ficino 1975, 180–1; for the development of Ficino's "ancient theology" see Hankins 1990a, II: 460–4; Allen 1998, 1–49.
61. On this point see Allen 1998, 26–47.
62. See Celenza 2004, 80–114.
63. Poliziano 1986, 10.37–11.1.
64. The quotation is from Hankins 1990a, I: 277–8; for the work itself see Ficino 2001–6. The classic synthetic study of Ficino's philosophy based primarily on the *Platonic Theology* is Kristeller 1943, 1988. On the *Theology*, see also chapter 11 in this volume.
65. This aspect of Ficino's thought has been extensively studied by M. J. B. Allen in Allen 1982, reprinted in Allen 1995, and Allen 1989, 48–82; see also Kristeller 1988, 66–85; and for a comprehensive study of medieval and Renaissance views of ontological hierarchy, see Mahoney 1982b.
66. See Nicholas of Cusa 1977, 1985; Blum 2004, 140–3; and chapter 9 in this volume.
67. Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.2.1, 5–7; Plato, *Republic* 7, 514a and ff.
68. Ficino 2001–6, Book 1, chs. 1–6, goes through the ontological hierarchy from body up to God; 1.1 shows that, as its title states, "were the soul not immortal, no creature would be more miserable than man." For the sources of Ficino's metaphysical scheme, see Allen 1995, article VIII, and Mahoney 1982b.
69. Vasoli 1999, 73–89; Kristeller 1988, 113–18.
70. Quality is, in effect, form-in-matter; for Ficino's indebtedness to Proclus on this score, see the studies of Allen, cited above in note 65.
71. On the concept of seeds see Hirai 2002.
72. Kristeller 1988, 153–79.
73. Ficino 2001–6, 30–1 (1.3.4).
74. Descartes 1971–, VII: 71–90.
75. Perhaps the closest premodern to the Cartesian conception is Plotinus, who in his *Enneads*, 4.1.1.18–19, conceived of soul as a kind of being that "in no way admits division, is without parts and cannot be divided into parts: it does not admit any extension, even in our thought about it . . ." But as Dominic J. O'Meara points out, Descartes's extensionless "mind" does not have the kind of productive effects on the material world (a world of physical bodies with their own interlinked causes) that soul does for Plotinus; see O'Meara 1993, 20.
76. For an overview, see K. Park and E. Kessler in Schmitt *et al.* 1988, 455–63, 464–84, and 485–534.
77. For the history of the concept of resurrection, see Bynum 1995 and Vidal 2002.
78. See Ficino 2002; for an English translation see Ficino 1985; see also "Einleitung" by P. R. Blum in Ficino 1994; and Leitgeb 2004.
79. For an edition, see Orpheus (pseudo) 1983.



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80. Ficino 1985, 179, cited in Voss 2002, 236; an important analysis of Ficino and Orpheus is in Allen 1984.
81. Ficino 2002, 31–5 (2.4); see Hirai 2002, 260.
82. Ficino 2002, 163–73 (6.10), cited and translated in Voss 2002, 237.
83. Ficino 1988, 110 (1.2, 11–15).
84. Ficino 2001–6, II: 234–35 (7.6.1).
85. Ficino 2002, 52–5 (3.1) = Ficino 1959, 1328.
86. Ebbersmeyer 2002.
87. Diacceto 1561.
88. Ibid., 3–4.
89. On him, see Kristeller 1956–96, I: 287–336; Verde 1973–1994, II: 218–22; Walker 1958, 30–5.
90. Baldassare Castiglione, *Il libro del cortegiano*, cited by S. Matton in Diacceto 1986, 371.
91. See Bembo 1991.
92. See Hankins 2003–4, II: 493–509.
93. Steuco 1591, III: 1r–207v (original edition 1540); see Schmitt 1966, 516, n. 66. For recondite Proclian interests among the Augustinians, see Monfasani 2005.
94. Steuco 1591, I: unpaginated preface.
95. Ibid. I: 1r.
96. See Leibniz 1875–90, III: 624–5, cited by Schmitt 1966, 506, n. 11.
97. See Colet 1985 and Colet 1873, *ad indicem* s. v. Ficino; Jayne 1963; Trapp 1986, reprinted in Trapp 1990; Jayne 1995.
98. On him see Copenhaver 1978. For Ficinian Platonic love theory in France, see Festugière 1941.
99. Scève 1966, 1974; on him see Coleman 1975.
100. For Du Bellay, see Coleman 1980 and Tucker 1990; for Ronsard, Simonin 1990.
101. See Tigerstedt 1974; Matton 2001; Hankins 2006b.
102. Yates 1964, 398–455; Purnell 1976; Copenhaver 1992, Introduction; Grafton 1991.
103. Brucker 1767 (original edition 1742–4; repr. 1975) presents a portrait of the revival of Platonism at 4.1: 41–61: though praising Ficino as of good character, Brucker says that Ficino's variety of Platonism was clouded by excessive superstition and a too credulous reliance on late ancient Platonists; see 4.1: 52–5. For background on Brucker see Schmidt-Biggeman and Stammen 1998; Kelley 2002, 164–6.
104. See Celenza 2005.



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# 6

JILL KRAYE

# The revival of Hellenistic philosophies

In the Renaissance the Hellenistic period was not recognized as a distinctive phase in the development of ancient philosophy. Only in the nineteenth century was the term "Hellenistic" adopted to describe the three centuries between the dissolution of Alexander the Great's empire, following his death in 323 BC, and the beginning of the Roman Empire in 31 BC, in the aftermath of the Battle of Actium. The three main philosophies nowadays classified as Hellenistic – Stoicism, Epicureanism and skepticism (in both its Academic and Pyrrhonist forms) – fall broadly within that timeframe, though the chronological boundaries are sufficiently elastic to include the Stoics Seneca, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, who lived in the first and second centuries AD.[1] For all three Hellenistic schools, the aim of studying philosophy was to attain a state of calmness and peace of mind in our daily lives. Each school, however, set out a different path to that goal: for the Stoics, it lay in rooting out pathological emotions; for the Epicureans, in eliminating irrational fears of the afterlife and unnatural desires in the present life; and for the skeptics, in removing the anxiety produced by the futile search for certain knowledge.[2] Renaissance interest in the Hellenistic schools centered on these competing claims.

Lacking any collective identity as Hellenistic philosophies, Stoicism, Epicureanism and skepticism each underwent its own revival over the course of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, as part of the ongoing recovery of ancient literature and thought. Although these sects became much better known than they had been in the Middle Ages, they nevertheless remained on the margins of Renaissance philosophical culture, which continued to be dominated, particularly in the universities, by Aristotelianism.[3] Many of those who engaged with the Hellenistic sects were not philosophers but humanists, vernacular authors, and religious thinkers. And approval or disapproval of these sects usually turned on theological rather than philosophical considerations.

A substantial number of works by Aristotle and Plato survived intact from antiquity and were recovered during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.



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By contrast, the writings of the Greek Hellenistic philosophers have come down to us only in fragmentary form – a few short treatises by Epicurus are the sole exception. This made the task of recovery far more challenging: begun in the early seventeenth century, it was not fully accomplished until modern times. Faced with these difficulties, Renaissance scholars relied in part on Latin authors, above all Cicero, whose philosophical dialogues contained useful, though not always accurate, information about all three Hellenistic schools, and Seneca, whose moral letters and dialogues conveyed the views not only of the Stoic sect, to which he belonged, but also those of Epicurus, whom he begrudgingly admired. They also looked to Greek authors of the Roman Empire such as Sextus Empiricus, who provided the fullest account of Pyrrhonist skepticism, and Plutarch, a Platonist whose moral treatises served as hostile, but nonetheless informative, witnesses to the doctrines of the Stoics, Epicureans and skeptics.[4]

Another late Greek work, probably dating from the third century AD, that exerted considerable influence in the Renaissance was *The Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* by Diogenes Laertius, still today an indispensable source for Greek philosophy, including the Hellenistic sects.[5] Despite a resurgence of interest in Greek from the late fourteenth century onward, philosophical works did not have much impact until they became available in Latin. This happened with Diogenes' *Lives* in 1433. The translator was Ambrogio Traversari (1386–1439), a Camaldulensian monk who normally devoted his humanist skills to Christian writers. Justifying – as much to himself as to his dedicatee, Cosimo de' Medici – the time and effort he had expended on this pagan treatise, Traversari explained that the doctrines of the philosophers discussed by Diogenes were "largely in agreement with Christian truth," while their lives provided examples so close "to evangelical perfection" that they put Christian philosophers to shame. Yet he also maintained that, repelled by "the squalor of ancient errors," Christians would be filled with a desire for sacred works and seek refuge in the inner sanctum of divine truth.[6] Both reactions to Greek philosophy would prove crucial in the Renaissance reception of the Hellenistic schools.

Traversari's translation of Diogenes Laertius' *Lives* circulated widely in manuscript and, after 1472, in print. Together with other classical sources, it helped Renaissance authors to construct accounts of ancient philosophy in which the Hellenistic sects played a prominent part. A letter of 1458 by the Florentine humanist Bartolomeo Scala (1430–79) is typical of the genre. Stoic, Epicurean and skeptic philosophers are all given their due, alongside Plato, Aristotle, Socrates, and the Presocratics. As ambivalent as Traversari about the relationship of pagan philosophy to Christianity, Scala notes that while the Stoics, Epicureans and skeptics, as well as Plato and Aristotle,



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wrote much that was "divinely inspired," they also went astray on many issues. Therefore, as a Christian "strolling through the fields of pagan philosophy," he was always careful to avoid treading barefoot on "a poisonous snake lurking among the plants and flowers."[7]

Diogenes Laertius' "Life of Socrates" was a valuable source for the 1440 biography of the philosopher by the Florentine scholar Giannozzo Manetti (1396–1459). It was mostly by lengthy quotations from Cicero, however, that Manetti built up his portrayal of Socrates as "the founder of all philosophy," who had bequeathed a different part of his legacy to each of the ancient schools.[8] The Spanish humanist and philosopher Juan Luis Vives (1492–1540) likewise relied on a combination of Diogenes Laertius and Cicero in his short treatise *On the Origins, Schools and Merits of Philosophy* (1518). He, too, presented Socrates as "the sacred and august fountain" from which the various philosophical sects had flowed, not just the Platonic and Aristotelian schools, but also the Academic skeptics, who held "nothing as certain" and refuted "the opinions and formulations of others" as Socrates himself had done; the Stoics, whose founder Zeno of Citium was "the greatest rival of Socrates' unbending virtue"; and the Epicureans, whose pleasure-based ethics was a slightly less shameful variation on the hedonism of Aristippus of Cyrene, "the pupil of Socrates."[9] In a later work, *On the Causes of the Corruption of the Arts* (1531), Vives praised Socrates for inventing the discipline of ethics. Although this fact was reported by Diogenes Laertius,[10] what captured the imagination of Vives, Manetti, and countless other writers was Cicero's statement that Socrates had been the first to bring philosophy down from the heavens and place it in the cities.[11] According to Vives, although Socrates was "learned in every branch of philosophy," he wanted "to improve himself through the proper disposition of his soul" and also "to benefit the general good by making known the principles of this medicine."[12] This Socratic conception of philosophy as a cure for troubled souls remained a central feature of the Renaissance revival of the Hellenistic schools.

## Stoicism

Stoicism, the best known and the most highly regarded of the Hellenistic schools during the patristic and medieval periods, began the Renaissance with a head-start over Epicureanism and skepticism. The works of Cicero and Seneca, containing sympathetic accounts of Stoic philosophy, were in wide circulation in the Middle Ages, while the forged correspondence between Seneca and St. Paul, universally accepted as genuine, lent support to the view, found in many Church Fathers, that Stoic moral philosophy was broadly in line with Christianity.[13] Yet, with only a handful of exceptions,



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medieval philosophers knew little more about the Stoics than that they considered virtue to be the supreme good and thought everything was ruled by fate.[14] In the course of the Renaissance, knowledge of Stoicism, especially its moral philosophy, was considerably deepened. Those who explored its doctrines, however, did not always approve of what they found.[15]

Like so much else in the Renaissance, the revival of Stoicism began with the Italian humanist Petrarch (1304–74). His best-selling moral encyclopedia, *Remedies for Good and Bad Fortune* (1366), helped to transmit many Stoic ethical doctrines: that emotions are mental illnesses; that virtue is the only good and vice the only evil, so that physical pain, for instance, no matter how severe, cannot be considered an ill; and that we should accept the human lot assigned to us with firmness and strength of mind, not giving way to rancor or complaint. Stoic positions patently in conflict with Christianity – their conviction, for example, that suicide was sometimes an acceptable option for the wise man – were resolutely denounced. In general, however, Petrarch stressed the harmony between Stoic and Christian morality, presenting Job, and above all Christ himself, as heroic figures who had endured tribulation and excruciating pain more stoically than the Stoics themselves.[16]

While many fifteenth-century humanists shared Petrarch's esteem for Stoic moral philosophy, others questioned the wisdom, and even feasibility, of following its stern prescriptions. After the death of his son, Manetti became disillusioned with Stoicism, though not with Seneca, whose "unique and innumerable virtues" he professed to "love and venerate" with all his heart and mind.[17] In a consolatory dialogue of 1438, Manetti recounts a conversation with his brother-in-law, who used Senecan arguments to bolster his case that the pain experienced at the loss of a child was merely an illusory product of the human mind. The grief-stricken Manetti could not agree. While the "Stoics, more severe than other philosophers, say that sorrow and other perturbations of the mind are evils of opinion and not of nature," he sided with the Aristotelians, who hold that such emotions, provided they are moderate, are natural and legitimate, a position "which accords more truly with human life."[18]

Lorenzo Valla (1407–57) was no fan of Aristotelian ethics, but he shared Manetti's opinion that the Stoics made impossible demands on human nature. What really incensed him, however, was the reverence of his fellow humanists for this flagrantly pagan morality. In his dialogue *On Pleasure*, completed in the 1440s, Valla, the first Renaissance scholar to reject the authenticity of the Seneca–St. Paul correspondence, maintained that treating the Stoic heroes of pagan antiquity as equivalent in virtue to the Christian saints and martyrs amounted to declaring "that Christ came into the world to no avail" or rather that "he did not come at all." Valla's aim was to set the record straight and to "fight in Christ's honor" by proving that the Stoic philosophers, who asserted



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the value of virtue more vehemently than all others, "have not followed virtue, but the shadow of virtue, not honor but empty pride, not duty but vice, not wisdom but folly." As St. Paul had decreed: "All that does not proceed from faith is sin." Stoics such as Cato were not pursuing virtue for its own sake, as they hypocritically claimed, but rather seeking their own pleasure, since what they really wanted was to enjoy the benefits, both present and posthumous, which accrued from having a reputation for virtue.[19]

A Stoic doctrine that frequently came in for criticism on religious grounds was the Stoics' conviction that the wise man was entirely responsible for his own happiness and had no need of divine assistance. The Jesuit Martin Del Rio (1551–1608), when compiling a school anthology of Latin tragedy in the 1590s, placed this among the pernicious Stoic tenets that were to be found in the plays of Seneca, like a "scorpion hiding in the leaves"[20] – a simile that recalls Scala's suspicion of pagan doctrines. On the other hand, Vives, who was prepared to criticize the Stoics for their "overly subtle arguments, cavils and sophistries,"[21] believed their wise man, if such a person existed, would be "worthy of admiration and divine" on account of his "incredible steadfastness of mind and extirpation of all passions." Moreover, there would be no "truer Christian," if he "could be induced to believe the precepts of our religion," as Vives was certain he could.[22]

The Stoic classification of pity as a vice, along with other pathological emotions, also struck a discordant note with Christians. John Calvin (1509–64) spoke for Protestants and Catholics alike when he declared in his commentary on Seneca's *De clementia* (1532) that someone who "feels no pity cannot be a good person."[23] The essayist Michel de Montaigne (1533–92), who respected the stern morality of the Stoics but despised the inhumanity which so frequently accompanied it, found this doctrine particularly unpalatable: "to the Stoics pity is a vicious passion; they want us to succor the afflicted, but not to unbend and sympathize with them."[24]

The greatest Renaissance exponent of Stoicism, Justus Lipsius (1547–1606), was well aware that such beliefs, which deeply offended Christian sensibilities, were stumbling blocks in the path of the philosophy's widespread acceptance. In *On Constancy in Times of Public Calamity* (1584), published in Latin but soon translated into a number of European vernaculars, the Flemish humanist promoted Stoic philosophy as the only curative strong enough to alleviate the emotional distress caused by the civil and religious wars that blighted the continent in his day. He realized, however, that his contemporaries would be unable to swallow this pagan medicine unless it was diluted with large doses of Christian theology.[25] He therefore redefined pity as the active virtue of a noble mind that seeks to aid and ameliorate the suffering of others, and then contrasted it with



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commiseration, the passive vice of an abject and base mind that is cast down at the sight of another's misfortune.[26] By means of this philological sleight-of-hand, Lipsius transformed pity into a Stoic virtue indistinguishable from its Christian counterpart. Other objectionable beliefs were similarly squeezed into a Christian mold or left out of the picture.

*On Constancy* brought Lipsius' Christianized version of Stoicism to a popular audience. Twenty years later, in 1604, he published two handbooks aimed at a philosophical readership: *Guide to Stoic Philosophy* and *Physical Theory of the Stoics*. Both works were intended to serve as philosophical commentaries to his edition of Seneca, which came out the following year. Together they constituted the most learned account of Stoic philosophy produced since antiquity.[27] The *Guide* contains a detailed account of the origin and development of the Stoic sect under its early Greek leaders and later Roman disciples. It also examines the Stoic wise man and the paradoxes associated with him, such as his happiness even in the midst of torment. Each chapter is a collage of quotations, which Lipsius scissored from a vast range of Greek and Latin authors, both pagan and Christian, and pasted together with explanatory glosses that frequently point out parallels between Stoicism and Christianity.[28] In the companion volume, Lipsius, recognizing that it was not possible to live according to nature, as the Stoics recommended, without an understanding of its workings, presented an in-depth analysis of Stoic physics. Wherever possible, he imposed Christian interpretations on Stoic beliefs, equating fate, for example, with divine providence. Even Lipsius could not find a way to make the Stoics' pantheistic and materialistic conception of God acceptable, so he duly rejected it.

Thanks to Lipsius, Stoicism entered the seventeenth century on a new footing. Freed from the obstacles that had hindered its reception in the Renaissance, Stoic ethics was all the rage until about 1660.[29] And now that information was readily available concerning other aspects of Stoicism, its influence began to extend into many different areas of early modern philosophy and science.[30]

## Epicureanism

While it was difficult for Christians to embrace Stoicism wholeheartedly before the modifications introduced by Lipsius, the glaring theological errors of Epicureanism – denial of the immortality of the soul and of divine providence; belief that the universe had come into being by chance – ensured that it remained the pariah of ancient philosophies throughout the Renaissance.[31] Although a few fifteenth- and sixteenth-century thinkers were bold enough to advocate the Epicurean ethical principle that pleasure



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was the highest good, it was necessary to take this doctrine on its own, isolating it from the sect's more incriminating philosophical positions.

Dante (1265–1321) consigned Epicurus and his followers, "who make the soul die with the body," to the sixth circle of hell.[32] The Florentine chancellor Coluccio Salutati (1331–1406), in his allegorical interpretation of *The Labors of Hercules*, written in the 1380s and 90s when he was still in thrall to Stoicism, cast the Epicureans in a bad light not only for their belief that the soul was mortal but also for their shameless pursuit of worldly delights and sensual pleasures.[33] Petrarch, too, disparaged Epicureanism as "unmanly" and "disreputable," because its hedonistic ethics made no distinction between man and beast. Yet, as he admitted in his *Memorable Matters* (1343–5), he could not help admiring the "wise thoughts" uttered by Epicurus and recorded by Seneca. The troubles Petrarch experienced in his own life had taught him the truth of Epicurus' sage advice to scorn "fashionable opinions" and to follow nature instead, "for it promises riches without sorrow or disturbance."[34]

The calumnies that had traditionally blackened the reputation of Epicurus and his philosophy were still being repeated in the fifteenth century, even by scholars who knew better. The Florentine humanist Leonardo Bruni (1370–1444) presented an accurate account of the Epicurean school in his *Isagogue of Moral Philosophy* (*c.* 1425), noting their belief that it was "the virtues which produce the greatest number of pleasures."[35] Yet in a letter from the same decade he mocked Epicurus for maintaining that prodigals and drunkards, who squander their inheritance on obscene pleasures, were happy.[36] Bruni's contemporary Francesco Filelfo (1398–1481), writing to a friend in 1428, tried to dispel such slurs by explaining that pleasure, even of the Epicurean variety, was related "both to the mind and to the body." Filelfo also insisted that, contrary to popular opinion, Epicurus was not "addicted to pleasure, lewd and lascivious," but rather "sober, learned and venerable."[37] When the Florentine humanist Cristoforo Landino (*c.* 1424–98) glossed Dante's verses on Epicurus in his influential commentary on the *Divine Comedy* (1481), he showed himself well informed about the scientific reasoning behind the Epicurean belief that the soul dies with the body – since both body and soul are material entities composed of "subtle particles," or atoms, that eventually dissolve into their component parts. In discussing Epicurean ethics, however, he merely repeated the old saw that Epicurus placed happiness in bodily pleasure and unhappiness in bodily pain. Like Petrarch, he regarded this view as more suitable for animals than humans, who are born "not to fill their stomachs and satisfy their sensual desires," but rather, as Landino's Platonic studies had taught him, "to contemplate divine matters." Nevertheless, he conceded that Epicurus' actions were better than his words, since his sobriety and self-restraint had earned the praise of Seneca.[38]



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New sources of information about Epicureanism had been available for some years: Traversari's translation of Diogenes Laertius' biography of Epicurus, containing most of his extant writings; and the poem *On the Nature of Things* by the philosopher's Roman disciple Lucretius, discovered in 1417 by Poggio. But entrenched prejudices were not so easy to dislodge. Italian humanists, to be sure, avidly read and copied Lucretius' poem – some fifty-three manuscripts survive from the fifteenth century, together with four printed editions issued between 1474 and 1500. Yet the evidence suggests that they concentrated on the poet's literary artistry, either ignoring or denouncing his unsavory philosophical and religious doctrines. It took a reader like Marsilio Ficino (1433–99), with a serious interest in philosophy, to delve deeply into these issues. In his youthful treatise *On Pleasure* (1457), he drew a clear distinction, based on Diogenes Laertius, between Aristippus and his followers, for whom happiness consisted in pursuing pleasurable sensations and avoiding painful ones, and Epicurus, for whom happiness consisted in the absence of both bodily pain and mental anguish.[39] Ficino's analysis of the physical theory underlying the Epicurean position relied heavily on Lucretius, who also neatly summed up the moral argument for him: "All that nature cries out for is this: that pain should be removed from the body and that the mind, kept away from care and fear, should enjoy a feeling of delight" (II.17–19).

Although Ficino understood and was seemingly well disposed toward this notion of tranquility, he had nothing but contempt for the Epicurean doctrine of the soul's materiality and mortality. In his *Platonic Theology* (1474), an exhaustive philosophical defense of the immortality of the soul, the mature Ficino lamented the need to refute "those two ungodly figures, Lucretius and Epicurus," who did not put forward "any cogent argument" but merely muddied the waters "with their usual clamor."[40] Even though the Peripatetic philosopher Pietro Pomponazzi (1462–1525) took the opposite position on the soul from the Platonist Ficino, arguing the Aristotelian case for mortality, his attitude toward Epicureanism was no less hostile. In his treatise *On the Immortality of the Soul* (1516) he resolutely dissociated his controversial thesis from the popular perception that those who believe the soul perishes with the body are "most impious and wicked men, like cowardly Epicurus" and "mad Lucretius."[41]

The Epicurean denial of immortality and of divine providence was a millstone around the neck of the school, which the small number of Renaissance thinkers who wanted to take up the sect's ethical doctrines somehow had to get rid of. One tactic, adopted by the Lombard humanist Cosma Raimondi (d. 1436), in his *Defense of Epicurus* (*c.* 1429), was to side-step such issues altogether. He states that in endorsing the Epicurean view that pleasure is the



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supreme good, he is not "considering that absolute and true philosophy which we call theology," for his "entire enquiry concerns the human good of humankind." Having removed the ground from any Christian criticism of the doctrine, Raimondi goes on to complain that the Stoics, by placing happiness in virtue alone, disregard the body, which is "part of mankind and properly pertains to it," since "the body houses the soul and is the other half of what man is." Epicurus, by contrast, understood the importance of the body and realized that "man's whole constitution is geared towards the perception of pleasure" and that nature itself "carries us towards it." Virtue, he recognized, was not pursued for its own sake, as the Stoics maintained, but because it allows us "to lead an enjoyable life by avoiding those pleasures that we should not seek and seeking those we should."[42]

Valla devised a more audacious method of utilizing the ethical core of Epicureanism while discarding its pagan husk. In his dialogue *On Pleasure*, Valla's spokesman gives preference to Epicurean insight that pleasure is the motivation for all human behavior, including virtuous conduct, over the Stoics' empty claim that virtue should be pursued for its own sake. He says, however, that Epicureans were mistaken in thinking that "virtue is to be desired for the sake of earthly profit" instead of "as a step toward that perfect happiness" attained by the soul in the next life.[43] Since rejection of the afterlife was a fundamental tenet of Epicureanism, Valla was clearly not attempting to formulate a Christian version of the philosophy, as Lipsius would later do with Stoicism. Rather, he was wrenching an Epicurean doctrine from its pagan context and using it to reinterpret Christian theology. Erasmus (*c.* 1469–1536), who took up the same theme in his colloquy "The Epicurean" (1533), shifted the emphasis from the pleasures of heavenly beatitude to the mundane joys experienced by a godly man living a pious Christian life.[44] But the Dutch humanist had no more intention than his Italian predecessor of making ancient Epicureanism into a viable option for contemporary Christians. Instead, he used carefully selected Epicurean doctrines to buttress his own brand of piety, far removed from the naturalistic ethics of ancient Epicureanism.

The moral creed of the fictional community described by Erasmus' English friend Thomas More (1478–1535) in his *Utopia* (1516) was closer in spirit to ancient Epicureanism, since the Utopians were not Christians and looked to nature, not Christ, for ethical guidance. Like the Epicureans, they valued pleasures "only insofar as they are necessary," rated the pleasure that "consists in a calm and harmonious state of the body" as superior to the kind that "fills the sense with clearly perceptible sweetness" and clung "above all to mental pleasures." Crucially, however, they did not subscribe to those doctrines that, for Renaissance thinkers, put Epicureans beyond the pale not



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only of civilized society but of humanity: the belief that souls "perish with the body" and that "the world is the mere sport of chance" and "not governed by any divine providence."[45]

The broadminded case for toleration that the French political thinker Jean Bodin (1530–96) put in the mouths of the interlocutors in his *Colloquium of the Seven about Secrets of the Sublime*, a clandestine work that circulated in manuscript until the nineteenth century, specifically excluded the Epicureans on the ground that it was "much better to have a false religion than no religion." Epicurus, in "trying to uproot the fear of divinity," had committed the "unpardonable sin" of removing the sanction of rewards and punishments in the afterlife, without which civilization would descend into anarchy.[46] For the Italian physician and mathematician Girolamo Cardano (1501–76), the Epicureans' denial of divine providence put them on the level of cannibals and barbarians.[47] Like most Renaissance writers, Bodin and Cardano equated Epicureans with atheists. The Italian jurist Alberico Gentili (1552–1608) was unusual in pointing out that they were in fact superior to atheists since Epicureans recognized and venerated the gods, even though they denied their concern for human affairs.[48]

The few sixteenth-century commentators willing to tackle *On the Nature of Things* knew it was incumbent on them to justify their interest in this poetic manifesto of Epicureanism. Denys Lambin (1516–72), who lectured on Lucretius at the University of Paris, acknowledged that the poem championed impious beliefs, but remarked that it was, after all, a poem – a beautiful and distinguished one, at that. And if Lucretius and his mentor Epicurus held views opposed to the Christian religion, the same could be said of Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics.[49] While Lucretius became a model for neo-Latin didactic and scientific poets, they tended to write Lucretian-style poems that either denounced his Epicurean philosophy or subverted it: for instance, by appropriating his words and imagery to uphold the immortality of the soul. The poet and physician Girolamo Fracastoro (*c.* 1478–1553) imitated Lucretius' terminology when describing the "French disease" in his *Syphilis* (1530), but made little use of his scientific theories.[50] Those theories, especially atomism and the infinity of the universe, were taken up by one of the most daring philosophers of the Renaissance, Giordano Bruno (1548–1600). He had no truck, however, with Lucretius' Epicurean rejection of immortality and divine providence, deriving his inspiration on these issues from the Platonic tradition.[51]

Bruno's interest in Epicurean science pointed the way forward. The desire of early modern scientists to exploit the sect's atomist physics provided the motivation to find a persuasive means of neutralizing its abhorrent doctrines. By the mid-seventeenth century Epicureanism at long last attained philosophical respectability.[52]



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## Skepticism

Less was known about skepticism in the Middle Ages than about the other Hellenistic philosophies, so that its recovery in the Renaissance was more of a novelty.[53] Such information as was available to medieval readers concerned the Academic variety, associated with Plato's successors in the Academy, most importantly Arcesilaus, who countered the dogmatism of the Stoics by asserting that nothing can be known and that therefore no judgments can be made, and Carneades, who took the more moderate view that it was sometimes possible to make judgments on the basis of probability. Cicero, a disciple of the sect, wrote about it in his *Academica*, which was not much read in the Middle Ages, though St. Augustine's reply to the dialogue, *Contra Academicos*, achieved wider circulation.[54] Pyrrhonist skepticism was virtually unknown until Traversari's translation of Diogenes Laertius' *Lives*, containing a biography of the school's founder, Pyrrho of Elis. His disciples differed from the Academic skeptics in asserting that it is not even possible to know that nothing can be known. The only recourse is to suspend all judgment, which has the salutary effect of producing a state of unperturbed mental tranquility.

Although Petrarch owned a manuscript of the *Academica* and included it in the list of his "favorite books," he made far less use of it than of other works by Cicero. The purpose of his treatise *On His Own Ignorance and That of Many Others* (1367) was not to question the possibility of attaining certain knowledge but to devalue Aristotelian philosophy, which he did without the aid of skeptical arguments.[55] Salutati, in a letter of 1403, drawing on Augustine as well as Cicero, noted that the Academics held "the firm and obstinate view that nothing at all can be known" and did not even trust the evidence of the senses "since we see every day that they are deceived."[56] Raimondi dismissed the Academics as "insane": "What kind of philosophy is it," he asked, "that denies that anything is certain?"[57] Ficino also refused to take the sect seriously: holding "nothing certain," they "mixed up and confused things" that were by their nature "separate and distinct," and therefore were "rejected by all the best philosophers."[58] Both Manetti and Scala, however, gave the Academics a more positive spin by stressing their descent from Socrates, who "used to maintain that he knew only one thing, namely, that he knew nothing."[59]

Although a medieval Latin translation of Sextus Empiricus' *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* survives in three manuscripts, one of which also contains a partial version of his *Against the Professors*, neither work had any perceptible influence in the Middle Ages.[60] During the Renaissance, Greek manuscripts of these treatises began to circulate: the émigré Byzantine scholar Cardinal Bessarion (*c.* 1403–72) owned one, as did Filelfo, who translated



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lengthy passages from the eleventh book of *Against the Professors* and inserted them, unacknowledged, into his dialogue on exile. Later in the century, Angelo Poliziano (1454–94) copied out large portions of Sextus and put them into notebooks, along with passages from other Greek authors, to form a vast encyclopedia structured around the liberal arts. Poliziano and other humanists, ignoring the epistemological issues discussed by Sextus, mined the text for information about classical culture.[61]

The move from a philological to a philosophical reading of Sextus began with Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola (1469–1533), nephew of the more famous Giovanni Pico (1463–94), who himself had studied the arguments against astrologers in Book 5 of *Against the Professors* when preparing to write his *Disputations against Divinatory Astrology*, posthumously published in 1496.[62] A well-trained humanist, Gianfrancesco employed his erudition to undermine the foundations of pagan philosophy, above all Aristotelianism, in order to shore up the authority of the Bible, as interpreted by the Catholic Church. In his hagiographical life of Girolamo Savonarola (1452–98), dating from the 1530s, Gianfrancesco claimed that the Dominican preacher, recognizing the destructive potential of Greek skepticism, had commissioned a Latin translation of Sextus Empiricus. What Savonarola got instead, long after his death, was Gianfrancesco's *Examination of the Vanity of Pagan Learning and the Truth of Christian Teaching* (1520), a bonfire of the intellectual vanities kindled by skeptical arguments borrowed from Sextus. Gianfrancesco regarded Pyrrhonist skepticism as ideally suited to his fundamentalist campaign, since it challenged the possibility of attaining certain knowledge by means of human reasoning or sense perception, but left the Scriptures, grounded in divine revelation, untouched.[63] As with the Christianization of Epicureanism by Valla and Erasmus, Gianfrancesco's adoption of Pyrrhonist reasoning was merely a stratagem, enabling him to argue more effectively for a dogmatic acceptance of the Bible that was totally at odds with the skeptical aims of the ancient sect.

Erasmus also enlisted skepticism in support of Christianity, tailoring the Academic rather than the Pyrrhonist variety to his purposes. "Human affairs are so manifold and obscure," he wrote in *The Praise of Folly* (1511), "that nothing can be clearly known, as is rightly taught by my friends the Academics, the least arrogant of the philosophers."[64] Despite this endorsement, he was not best pleased when Martin Luther (1483–1546), in their debate over freedom of the will in the mid-1520s, described himself as a Stoic asserter and accused Erasmus of being a skeptic doubter, who wanted "to compare everything" and "affirm nothing."[65] Though enraged at the charge, Erasmus, in his reply to Luther, put forward a Christian version of the Academic method, in which fallible human reason, confronted by



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uncertainty, was able to make judgments not on the basis of probability but on the authority of the Scriptures and of Church decrees.[66]

A more extreme form of skepticism was advanced by the German scholar Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa (1486–1535) in his declamation *On the Vanity and Uncertainty of the Arts and Sciences and the Excellence of the Word of God* (1530). As the title indicates, Agrippa's stance was similar to the fundamentalism of Gianfrancesco Pico. Though his work lacks the Pyrrhonist underpinning provided by Sextus Empiricus, Agrippa nonetheless availed himself of standard skeptical techniques to demonstrate that certainty was unattainable in human affairs. He argued, for example, that sense-based knowledge was unreliable since the senses are easily deceived, and he listed the profusion of conflicting opinions held by the practitioners of every branch of learning – from logic and moral philosophy to fishing and palmistry. It was therefore futile, he concluded, to search for the truth in the schools of the faithless philosophers, including the Academic skeptics: how can we acquire knowledge from the ignorance of Socrates or get any sense out of the peevishness of Arcesilaus and Carneades? Agrippa had no more interest in the philosophical aims of the skeptics than he did in those of the other pagan schools he attacked with epistemological weaponry raided from the skeptics' arsenal. For him, the uncertainty of all human knowledge led not to tranquility but to a humble acceptance that the certainty we crave and require can only be found in the Bible.[67]

In the middle decades of the sixteenth century Academic skepticism became embroiled in disputes over the Aristotelian stranglehold on the universities. Those who wanted to topple the Peripatetic edifice took up the tools of the skeptics to strike at the foundations of Aristotelian dogmatism. The Aristotelians fought back by portraying the skeptics' claim that certain knowledge was unachievable as a threat to both philosophy and religion.[68] Although the Portuguese physician Francisco Sanchez (1551–1623) entitled his treatise *That Nothing Is Known* (1581), it is less a defense of skepticism than an attempt to prove, based more on the Galenic tradition of medical empiricism than on Academic arguments, that Aristotelian science, with its definitions and demonstrative syllogisms, cannot produce certain knowledge.[69]

Pyrrhonist skepticism finally came into its own in the 1560s, when the treatises of Sextus Empiricus became available in Latin. In the preface to his translation of the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (1562), the Huguenot scholar and publisher Henri Estienne (1528–98) described how he had achieved peace of mind after a bout of depression by reading the skeptical refutation of "all professors of all subjects." Having experienced the power of skepticism to cure his own illness, Estienne prescribed the Pyrrhonist suspension of judgment as a remedy for the "disease of impiety" from which the "dogmatist



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philosophers" of his day were suffering.[70] The Latin translation of *Against the Professors* (1569) by the Counter-Reformation theologian and polemicist Gentian Hervet (1499–1584) came out together with a reprint of Estienne's version of the *Outlines*. If this was a clever publishing strategy to market skepticism on both sides of the confessional divide, it was foiled by Hervet's explicitly stated objective of marshaling the forces of Pyrrhonist skepticism against the heretical dogmatism of the Calvinists. Proudly following in the footsteps of Gianfrancesco Pico, who had used Sextus "to defend the dogmas of the Christian religion against the pagan philosophers," Hervet once again put skepticism in the service of Catholic orthodoxy.[71]

A copy of the 1562 edition of the *Outlines* was in the library of Montaigne, who, like Estienne, was attracted by the ability of Pyrrhonism to bring about "a peaceful and sedate condition of life, exempt from the agitations we receive" from the "knowledge we think we have of things." Montaigne regarded the position of the Pyrrhonists, who professed "to waver, doubt, and inquire, to be sure of nothing, to answer for nothing," as "bolder and more plausible" than that of the Academics, who "admitted that some things were more probable than others": "either we can judge absolutely," he wrote, "or we absolutely cannot." Pyrrhonism enabled him to deflate the overblown pretensions of human reason and, in an epoch of sectarian fanaticism, to destabilize the dogmatism "by which we are not allowed not to know what we do not know." Yet Montaigne, like other sixteenth-century writers, regarded the uncertainty of the skeptics and the serenity to which it led not as self-justifying ends but as a way of preparing the soul to receive divine certainty. In his eyes the ultimate value of the skeptics' image of man, "naked and empty, acknowledging his natural weakness" and "stripped of human knowledge," was that it showed him to be "a blank tablet prepared to take from the finger of God such forms as he shall be pleased to engrave on it."[72]

In contrast to Stoicism and Epicureanism, whose philosophical potential could not be fully realized until their doctrines were accommodated to Christianity, skepticism had to be disentangled from the Christian interpretation imposed on it during the Renaissance before going on to exert a far more profound influence on early modern philosophy than the other Hellenistic schools.[73]

## NOTES

1. Algra *et al.* 1999.
2. Nussbaum 1994.
3. Schmitt 1983a.
4. Long and Sedley 1987.



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5. A Latin version, now lost, was made in southern Italy in the mid-twelfth century by Henricus Aristippus, who also translated Plato's *Meno* and *Phaedo*. It was the source for a widely diffused history of ancient philosophers, attributed to the Englishman Walter Burley but currently thought to have been written in the early fourteenth century by an anonymous Italian author. Hankins and Palmer 2007.
6. Stinger 1977, 74–6.
7. Scala 1997, 251–61, at 261.
8. Manetti 2003, 176–233, at 181–95; Hankins 2007.
9. Vives 1987, 18–57, at 38–41.
10. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 1.14 and 18.
11. Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 5.4.10. See Vives in Kraye 1997, I: 92–107, at 92–3; Manetti 2003, 181; and, for example, Petrarca 1975–85, II: 79.
12. Kraye 1997, I: 92.
13. Colish 1985; Verbeke 1983.
14. Ebbesen 2004.
15. Kraye 2001–2.
16. Petrarca 1991, III: 291–8 ("Suicide") and 267–79 ("Severe Pain").
17. See "Life of Seneca" in Manetti 2003, 234–87, at 281.
18. Manetti 1983, 46.
19. Valla 1977, 51–3, 263 (quoting Romans 14:23).
20. Mayer 1994, 159–67.
21. Kraye 1997, I: 94.
22. Vives 1987, 41.
23. Calvin 1969, 358–9.
24. Montaigne 1965a, 3–5, at 4 (I.1). See also Schneewind 2005.
25. Papy 2001–2.
26. Lipsius 1939, 98–100 (I.12).
27. Papy 2004; Morford 1991, 169–80.
28. Kraye 1997, I: 200–7.
29. Kraye 2001.
30. Osler 1991, 135–54, 221–38; Sorell 1993, 273–316; Miller and Inwood 2003, 7–29, 116–40.
31. Jones 1989, 94–165.
32. Dante 1971, 99 (10.13–15).
33. Salutati 1951, II: 460, 493–508; Witt 1983, 209–26.
34. Kraye 1997, I: 229–33.
35. Bruni 1987, 267–82, at 270.
36. Bruni 1741, II: 8–15, at 11.
37. Kraye 1997, I: 234–7, at 235.
38. Landino 2001, I: 578–81, at 581.
39. Ficino 1959, I: 1016–42, at 1034, 1039–42.
40. Ficino 2001–6, III: 163.
41. Cassirer *et al.* 1948, 280–381, at 350.
42. Kraye 1997, I: 238–44.
43. Valla 1977, 267.
44. Erasmus 1965, 535–51.
45. More 1965, 173–7, 221.
46. Bodin 1975, 162–3.



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47. *Theonoston* in Cardano 1966, II: 328, 398, 441.
48. Gentili 1598, 558–9.
49. Lucretius 1563, sigs. ā3$^{r}$–4$^{r}$.
50. Fracastoro 1984; Goddard 1993.
51. Michel 1973.
52. Jones 1989, 166–213; Osler 1991, 155–74, 197–219; Sorell 1993, 129–43; Miller and Inwood 2003, 90–115.
53. Schmitt 1983b; Popkin 2003, 17–43.
54. Schmitt 1972, 18–42.
55. Cassirer *et al.* 1948, 47–133.
56. Salutati 1891–1911, III: 598–614, at 603.
57. Kraye 1997, I: 241.
58. Ficino 1959, I: 986.
59. Manetti 2003, 179, 185; Scala 1997, 256.
60. Floridi 2002, 3–26, 63–70, 79–80.
61. Cao 2001.
62. Ibid., 259.
63. Schmitt 1967.
64. Erasmus 1979, 71.
65. Rupp and Watson 1969, 106–8.
66. Rummel 2000, 54–61; Schmitt 1972, 58–61.
67. Agrippa 1974, 386–9; Nauert 1965; Poel 1997.
68. Schmitt 1972, 81–157.
69. Sanchez 1988.
70. Floridi 2002, 72–7.
71. Sextus Empiricus 1569, sigs. ā2$^{r}$–3$^{r}$.
72. Montaigne 1965a, 373–5, 422; Hartle 2005.
73. Schmitt and Popkin 1987; Sorell 1993, 15–32; Popkin 2003, 64–302.



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# 7

DAG NIKOLAUS HASSE

# Arabic philosophy and Averroism

The names of the famous Arabic philosophers Averroes and Avicenna, alongside those of Alkindi, Alfarabi, and Algazel, appear in countless philosophical writings of the Renaissance. These authors are well-known figures of the classical period of Arabic philosophy, which stretches from the ninth to the twelfth century AD. The history of Arabic philosophy began in the middle of the ninth century, when a substantial part of ancient Greek philosophy had become available in Arabic translations: almost the complete Aristotle, numerous Greek commentaries on Aristotle, and many Platonic and Neoplatonic sources. A major centre of intellectual activity was Baghdad, the new capital of the Abbasid caliphs. It was here that Alkindi (al-Kindī, d. after AD 870), the first important philosopher of Arabic culture, and the Aristotelian philosopher Alfarabi (al-Fārābī, d. 950/1) spent the greater part of their life. A major turning point in the history of Arabic philosophy was the activity of Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā, d. 1037), the court philosopher of various local rulers in Persia, who recast Aristotelian philosophy in a way that made it highly influential among Islamic theologians. The famous Baghdad theologian Algazel (al-Ghazālī, d. 1111) accepted much of Avicenna's philosophy, but criticized it on central issues such as the eternity of the world. Averroes (Ibn Rushd, d. 1198), the Andalusian commentator on Aristotle, reacted to both Avicenna and Algazel: he censured Avicenna for deviating from Aristotle and criticized Algazel for misunderstanding the philosophical tradition.

Through Latin translations, the Christian Middle Ages became acquainted with important parts of the Arabic philosophical tradition between Alkindi and Averroes.[1] It is true that philosophy continued to flourish after Averroes, especially in North Africa and in the Near East, but the works of its protagonists were not translated into Latin and thus escaped the attention of the Christian readers. The Arabic–Latin translation movement began in eleventh-century Italy, picked up speed in twelfth-century Spain, and was continued into the early thirteenth century at the court of Frederick II



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Hohenstaufen in southern Italy. The most important philosophical works translated were Alfarabi's *Catalogue of the Sciences* (*De scientiis*), Avicenna's *First Philosophy* (*Prima philosophia*) and *On the Soul* (*De anima*), and Averroes' long commentaries on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, *De anima, Physics*, and *De caelo*. Many disputes of scholasticism from the time of Albert the Great onwards were deeply colored by the positions, arguments, and terminology of these Arabic works.

The influence of the medieval translations continued in the Renaissance. It would be wrong, however, to conceive of this influence as a mere survival of moribund scholastic traditions. In fact, some themes of Arabic philosophy reached the peak of their influence as late as the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This is true, for example, of Averroes' intellect theory, zoology, and logic, and of Avicenna's philosophical theory of prophecy. Before we turn to the discussion of three successful theories within these areas, a few comments are in order regarding the circumstances responsible for the rise of Averroist and Avicennist trends in the Renaissance.

A key factor was the extraordinary authority Averroes had acquired as a university author who was read and taught in arts faculties all over Europe and especially in Renaissance Italy. His expositions of Aristotle had an overwhelming influence on the Italian commentary tradition, in particular at the University of Padua, the most important center of philosophical study in Europe during the Renaissance. This prominence is reflected in the existence of several super-commentaries on Averroes' own commentaries, such as those by Agostino Nifo on Averroes' long commentaries on the *De anima* and the *Metaphysics*,[2] and by Pietro Pomponazzi on Averroes' *Long Commentary on the Metaphysics*, Book XII.[3] Much philological and editorial care was invested in new and emended editions of his works, and prominent Aristotelian philosophers such as Nicoletto Vernia, Nifo, and Marcantonio Zimara took part in these editorial efforts. Zimara composed three often-printed works which served as guides to the differences and concordances between Aristotle and Averroes.[4] The history of Averroes editions in the Renaissance culminated in the impressive multivolume Giunta edition of 1550/2 in Venice, which presented the entire Aristotelian corpus together with a complete set of Averroes' works.[5]

This edition also contains most of the new translations of Averroes which were produced in the Renaissance. For a long time, since the medical translations in Montpellier and Barcelona around 1300, hardly any translations of Arabic texts had been produced. Around 1480, however, there began a new wave of translations, many of them via Hebrew intermediaries.[6] The movement lasted about seventy years, until the death of the last prolific translator, Jacopo Mantino, in 1549. The result is impressive: nineteen commentaries of



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Averroes were translated for the first time, in contrast with fifteen commentaries translated in the entire medieval period. Apart from Averroes' commentaries, the translations included other philosophical works by Averroes, several treatises on the soul by Avicenna, treatises by Alfarabi and Avempace (Ibn Bājja), and Ibn Ṭufayl's philosophical novel *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān*.[7] In the appendix to this chapter, the reader will find a list of Arabic philosophical works translated in the Renaissance.

Very few Renaissance translators worked directly from the Arabic, a notable exception being Andrea Alpago, the translator of Avicenna's treatises on the soul. That the other translations could be made was due to the richness of the Hebrew philosophical tradition. In contrast to the medieval translations, most of the new translations were made from the Hebrew, and most of the translators were Jewish scholars, often physicians by profession.

The reception of the newly translated works of Arabic philosophy has not yet been investigated. From a recent study we know that Jacopo Mantino's translation of Averroes' commentary on *De animalibus* was much used and cited by Agostino Nifo in his *De animalibus* commentary of the 1530s.[8] It is probable that other disciplines were influenced in a similar manner. Given the many commentaries on logic translated in the Renaissance, one can expect that this field was influenced by the new translations. A side-effect of the Averroes boom in Italian universities was that the arguments and positions of other Arabic philosophers mentioned in Averroes' commentaries received an increasing amount of attention, especially Alfarabi, Avempace, and Algazel.[9]

The most successful Arabic theories in the Renaissance, however, were not transmitted via the new translations. They had long been accessible in medieval Latin versions, but found particular resonance among Renaissance readers. Three theories will be discussed below: Averroes' theory of the unicity of the intellect, Avicenna's naturalistic explanation of miracles, and the opposing standpoints of Avicenna and Averroes on spontaneous generation, that is, on the generation of living beings from matter.

## Averroes' intellect theory

In his *Long Commentary on Aristotle's De anima* Averroes develops his most controversial philosophical thesis: that there is only one intellect for all human beings. No other Arabic philosophical theory received a similar amount of attention in the Renaissance. Averroes' theory of the intellect is difficult in itself, and its understanding is further complicated by the fact that the *Long Commentary* has not survived in Arabic (except for some fragments), but only in a thirteenth-century Arabic–Latin translation.[10] With



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respect to the unicity thesis, the most pertinent passage is the long digression contained in section III.5 of the commentary. Renaissance philosophers referred to this text as *digressio magna*, or simply as *commentum magnum*. It explicates Aristotle's *De anima* Γ.4, 429a21–4. Averroes here rejects the positions of previous Greek commentators on the human intellect, especially of Themistius and Alexander of Aphrodisias. Themistius is criticized for holding that both the material intellect and the grasped intelligibles are eternal. Alexander is rejected for maintaining that the human intellect is generated and corruptible.[11] Averroes' own position starts with the assumption, shared by Themistius, that for Aristotle the material intellect is pure potentiality to receive intelligible forms, and therefore must be incorporeal and eternal.[12] The material intellect is the ontological place and receiver of the intelligible forms, but not the medium through which the human being is joined to the intelligible. This role is taken by the actualized imaginative forms (the *phantasmata*): we grasp the intelligibles via the faculty of imagination.[13] Hence, in contrast to Themistius, Averroes insists that the intelligibles are grasped by each single individual insofar as they have their epistemological basis (*subiectum*) in imagination. They are eternal only with respect to their ontological basis, the eternal and unique material intellect, which is their incorporeal receiver.[14]

Averroes developed his own position in order to avoid several unhappy consequences which previous commentators did not account for. In his own view, his theory had the following advantages: it takes seriously Aristotle's claim in *De anima* Γ.4 (429a22 and 24–5) that the (material) intellect is pure potentiality and unmixed with the body; it explains universal intellection with a theory of abstraction from imaginative forms, rather than with a theory of the mere reception of eternal intelligibles through the material intellect, as did Themistius; it explains how individual intellection is possible even though the material intellect is eternal.

In the Latin West, Averroes' thesis found followers among university masters of arts of different times and places. Since it was integrated into a wide variety of intellect theories, it could assume different formats.[15] Its first followers belonged to a group of masters of arts around Siger of Brabant at the University of Paris. Thomas Aquinas reacted in 1270 with the *Treatise on the Unicity of the Intellect against the Averroists* (*Tractatus de unitate intellectus contra Averroistas*), in which he argued that Averroes could not explain the fact that a single person thinks (*hic homo singularis intelligit*).[16] Etienne Tempier, the bishop of Paris, included the unicity thesis in his well-known condemnations of philosophical theses of 1270 and 1277.[17] But Averroes' theory continued to find followers among the masters of arts. In the fourteenth century, the thesis was accepted, in different formulations, by



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a circle of scholars around Jean de Jandun, Thomas Wilton, and John Baconthorpe associated with the University of Paris, and by a group of teachers belonging to the arts faculty in Bologna.[18] When the term *averroista* was used in the Middle Ages by Thomas Aquinas and others, it was meant to refer to these defenders of the unicity thesis. The Averroist philosophers often promoted further theses of Averroes as well, such as the eternity of the world, the negation of God's infinite power, or the negation of God's knowledge of the particulars.[19] But it was the unicity thesis which most obviously served to identify partisans of Averroes.

In Renaissance Italy, Averroism for several reasons acquired an intensity and dynamism unparalleled in the Middle Ages. First of all, the number of Renaissance Averroists was simply larger than that of their medieval predecessors: the unicity thesis was adopted, more or less openly, in various writings of Paul of Venice, Niccolò Tignosi, Nicoletto Vernia, Alessandro Achillini, Agostino Nifo, Pietro Pomponazzi, Luca Prassicio, Francesco Vimercato, and Antonio Bernardi. Moreover, Renaissance Averroism displays greater coherence as a distinct tradition through a long line of teacher–student relations at the University of Padua: from Paul of Venice, via his students Gaetano da Thiene and Tignosi, to Vernia and his students Nifo and Pomponazzi, and, in the next generation, to Vimercato and Bernardi. Then, too, the Averroist current is more frequently the object of attack in the Renaissance than in the medieval period. And, most importantly, it is only in the Renaissance that the doctrinal direction of the Averroist school is challenged and debated openly within the school.

The founding figure of Renaissance Averroism[20] is Paul of Venice (d. 1429), a professor of the arts faculty in Padua. In the *Compendium of Natural Philosophy* (*Summa philosophiae naturalis*) of 1408, Paul accepts the unicity thesis and attributes it to Aristotle and Averroes. He argues inter alia that the unicity thesis is the only Aristotelian way to account for Aristotle's statement that "the intellect comes from outside" (*intellectus venit de foris*).[21] Moreover, since the intellective soul is ungenerated and incorruptible, there cannot be a plurality of souls, since otherwise there would exist an infinite number of souls.[22] There is a very tangible difference between Averroes' and Paul's version of the unicity thesis. Paul of Venice explicitly disagrees with Averroes' thesis that the individuality of intellection is rescued by the fact that we think by actualizing imaginative forms. Instead, Paul of Venice says that it is the intellective soul which is the medium of our knowledge. He therefore holds that the intellect is united to the body as its substantial form – a theory difficult to combine with the complete separability and incorporeality of the unique intellect.[23] In later years, Paul of Venice repeats the unicity thesis, but adds that it is not true from the



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standpoint of faith (*secundum opinionem fidei*).[24] This then is the ambiguous heritage of Paul of Venice to the subsequent discussion: on the one hand, a clear vote in favor of the unicity thesis as the true Aristotelian doctrine and as a thesis supported by many arguments; on the other hand, the modification that the intellect nevertheless is the substantial form of the body, and that the unicity thesis is false from the vantage point of Christian faith.

Nicoletto Vernia (d. 1499), Paul of Venice's second successor on the Paduan chair, was particularly outspoken about his Averroism, as we know from a *Quaestio* of 1480 with the title: *Whether the intellective soul ... is eternal and one in all human beings* (*Utrum anima intellectiva ... eterna atque unica sit in omnibus hominibus*).[25] The *Quaestio* seems to be incomplete: a final part on the true doctrine of the Christian faith is missing. Apart from a short introductory section, the text is divided in two parts. The first is a presentation of Averroes' thesis that the intellective soul is eternal and one in all human beings, and that the soul cannot be conjoined with the human body as its substantial form, but only like a captain to his ship. Vernia musters a series of arguments against Averroes' position and shows that they can be refuted. This section in defense of Averroes is particularly informative about Vernia's own standpoint on the topic. The second part of the treatise is meant to demonstrate that Averroes' unicity thesis is in full accordance with Aristotle.

In his defense of Averroes, Vernia argues as follows. It is true, he says, that the union between soul and body is loose, but it suffices for establishing a unified act of intellection.[26] The intellect operates eternally and without dependency upon any body. It is not the intellect itself, but only the thinking individual human being that depends upon *phantasmata*. The intellect is eternally united with the substance of the active intellect, which is a separate and eternal entity as well.[27] Vernia thus likens the possible intellect to a separate intelligence that has eternal intellection. In consequence, he argues that the unicity of the intellect is not affected if two individuals are of contrary opinion; the intellect is able to unite both sides. This is why Vernia does not follow Averroes' solution that the intelligibles are diversified insofar as they reside in the imagination of the individual human being.

The unicity thesis was attractive philosophically not only because it made the (material) intellect completely separate from matter, as Aristotle had postulated, but also because it elegantly explained the universality of intellectual knowledge. From a theological point of view, its major drawback was the implication that there was no personal immortality after the death of the body. This was the basis of the fierce opposition to Averroes from theologians and humanists. Francesco Petrarca castigated Averroes as the enemy of



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Christ. Coluccio Salutati found his views on God and on the soul most irreligious. Lorenzo Valla defamed him for his ignorance of Greek and for the wretched Latin style of his translators. Marsilio Ficino argued that his psychology was a danger to religion. If there was anything of value in his commentaries, said Ermolao Barbaro and Giovanni Faseolo, it had been stolen word for word from the Greek commentators.[28] The depiction of Averroes as a criminal found its counterpart in legendary stories describing him as a murderer.[29]

It is not surprising therefore that the partisans of Averroes were put under pressure, as happened in the case of Nicoletto Vernia. In a decree dated 4 May 1489, the bishop of Padua, Pietro Barozzi, threatened to excommunicate anybody who dared to teach publicly the unicity of the intellect. Vernia recanted in the following years. In 1492, he wrote a treatise entitled *Against Averroes' Perverse Opinion on the Unicity of the Intellect*.[30] In his testament, he declared that he never truly believed in the unicity thesis even if he had once erroneously taught in class that it accords with Aristotle. One should not, however, rely too heavily on these self-protective public statements. Even in the 1492 treatise *Against Averroes*, there are passages which are reminiscent of Averroes' theory. Vernia here declares on the authority of Albert the Great that the intellect, when it is knowing in actuality, has a universal power which guarantees that the intelligibles do not lose their universal character when grasped by the individual human being.[31] From this standpoint it is only a small step to Averroes' thesis that the intelligible forms are universal insofar as they reside in the intellect, and not in the *phantasmata*.

Agostino Nifo and Pietro Pomponazzi, both students of Vernia, concede in their early years that Averroes' theory appears to be the correct interpretation of Aristotle and that it is difficult to refute philosophically. Later they turn their backs on Averroes. In his 1504 treatise *On the Intellect* (*De intellectu*), Nifo for the first time sets out to refute the thesis as a philosophical error. He admits that a number of traditional arguments against Averroes cannot convince, for instance the argument that, if the intellect was one, a person would know something known by another person. In Nifo's eyes this can easily be countered by arguing that the two persons know individually because the intelligible form of the object coincides with and is connected to forms of the imagination.[32] It is clear from such passages that Averroes' thesis had epistemological strengths which Nifo finds difficult to counter. The reasons which Nifo advances against Averroes are of a different character. The standpoint of Averroes, says Nifo, is in conflict with certain principles of moral philosophy: God has to be honored; souls have their origin in God; the human being is a divine miracle; the divine law derives



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from God; human beings cannot live together without God.[33] Moreover, the unicity thesis violates two principles of natural philosophy. First, a single mover (such as the captain of a ship) moves exactly one appropriate object and not many, as a single intellect would. Second, no mover produces different effects of the same kind at the same time.[34] In other words: Nifo refers to the moral implications of the unicity thesis, since it jeopardizes the doctrine of individual immortality, the basis of religious morality, and he tries to demonstrate the impossibility of a causal connection between a single intellect and many persons. Apparently, Nifo's turn against Averroes was prompted by a cluster of moral, theological, and philosophical motivations. Since his writings bear clear signs of substantial reworking and self-censorship, it is possible that pressure from the Church played a role too. In view of this we should not take at face value what Nifo says in 1508: that he had defended Averroes in his youth, but later found his position to be ridiculous when reading and examining Aristotle in Greek.[35] If he did read Aristotle in Greek, it left hardly any traces in his published critique of Averroes.

Pietro Pomponazzi, in a manner similar to Nifo's, declares in the early Paduan lectures of 1503–4 that he dislikes Averroes' thesis, but that it nevertheless appears to be the proper interpretation of Aristotle. Pomponazzi was stuck in a dilemma. What he found attractive was the position of the Greek commentator Alexander of Aphrodisias, who had argued for the soul's complete dependency upon the body. But "against Alexander there is that very valid argument about universal <intellection>."[36] By this he means: Alexander's materialistic theory of the soul is countered by Averroes' argument that the intellective soul would not be able to know universal intelligibles if it was immersed in matter. In his famous *Treatise on the Immortality of the Soul* (*Tractatus de immortalitate animae*) of 1516, Pomponazzi finds a way to circumvent Averroes' argument. He now asserts that universal intelligibles are never properly received by the intellect. Rather, it is through the *phantasmata* only that a human being grasps the intelligibles. "The universal is comprehended in the particular," he says.[37] Pomponazzi has sacrificed Averroes' idea that an incorporeal intellect is a necessary condition for grasping universal intelligibles.

Not all Renaissance Averroists, however, later turned into fierce opponents of Averroes. Alessandro Achillini (d. 1512), for instance, does not explicitly adopt Averroes, but shows great sympathy for the unicity thesis: his arguments for Averroes are formulated with much diligence and persuasive power, whereas the counterarguments remain brief and unconvincing.[38] Luca Prassicio (d. 1533) writes a very explicit defense of Averroes' position. He believes that Averroes should not be accused of denying immortality; rather, Averroes is the best defender of immortality since he holds that the



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intellective soul is *simpliciter* immortal with respect to both active and material intellect. Prassicio's text was printed in 1521 as a contribution to the Italian-wide controversy over the immortality of the soul which was provoked by Pomponazzi. But Prassicio's real target is Nifo: he wants to show that Nifo's treatise on immortality of 1518 is full of misinterpretations of Averroes. Prassicio thus enters a fully fledged debate about the correct interpretation of Averroes. This is a salient feature which distinguishes Renaissance Averroism from earlier Averroisms: the correct interpretation of the party's leader, Averroes, becomes itself a topic of explicit dispute.[39]

The last two authors to defend Averroes' thesis in print apparently are Francesco Vimercato, a humanist and Aristotelian philosopher, who bases his position on arguments from Themistius and Averroes,[40] and Antonio Bernardi in 1562.[41] It is noteworthy that the key thesis of the Averroists disappeared so late; obviously, then, its disappearance cannot be explained solely by reference to the new knowledge of the Greek commentators, who presented alternative readings of Aristotle. The thesis also lost its philosophical attraction for figures exemplifying new trends within Aristotelianism, as can be witnessed in the writings of Melanchthon, Zabarella or Suárez.[42] These Aristotelian philosophers could dispense with the unicity thesis because they developed alternative explanations of universal intellection within the framework of Aristotelianism.

## Prophecy by imagination and will-power

When Avicenna's *On the Soul* (*De anima*), the psychological part of his philosophical summa *The Healing (al-Shifā')*, was translated into Latin around 1160, the Western scholastic world was confronted with a philosophical theory of the soul that was formulated within the terms of the Peripatetic tradition. One theory proved particularly challenging to the Latin West: a naturalistic explanation of prophecy and miracles. Avicenna in *De anima*, chapters IV.2, IV.4, and V.6, describes three different kinds of prophethood, which are all based on extraordinarily disposed faculties of the soul. The first kind concerns visions in waking life, which are perceived by persons equipped with a particularly powerful imaginative faculty. The second kind of prophecy rests on extraordinary will-power which is able to influence the matter of the world. The third is the highest prophetic power. It enables people who possess a very high degree of intuition to grasp the middle terms of a syllogism without instruction and thus to receive all intelligible forms from the separate active intellect in almost no time.

There is a history of scholastic reception in the case of all three of these prophethoods, but it was the second, prophethood by will-power, which was



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particularly influential in the Renaissance. Avicenna's theory is based on the observation that the soul of a human being is able to influence its own body, as when a sick person imagines that he is cured. Avicenna continues:

> This is the reason that a man can run fast on a plank of wood when it is put across a well-trodden path, but when it is put like a bridge over a chasm, he would hardly be able to creep over it. This is because he pictures to himself a fall so vividly that the natural power of the limbs accords with it.[43]

Hence, when beliefs are firmly fixed in the soul, they influence matter. Often the soul influences not only the matter of its own body, but also that of others, as in the case of the evil eye (*oculus fascinans* is the term used by the Latin translator). The underlying principle of Avicenna's reasoning is that nonmaterial causation of material effects is possible. Avicenna then distinguishes people with the evil eye from prophets who have a particularly noble and powerful soul, resembling the supra-human intelligences, and also have a body of pure nature. Matter throughout the world obeys such souls. They are able, by sheer will-power, to heal the sick or produce rain and fertile seasons. It is noteworthy that Avicenna does not once mention the divine realm in this context. In his view, neither sorcerers with the evil eye nor the prophets who produce miracles are in need of divine assistance.

In the Latin West, Avicenna's theory was often discussed, mostly critically.[44] From the time of Albert the Great onwards, it was argued that the theory is in conflict with the Aristotelian principle that there is no causation between separate things without mediation. One medieval solution to the problem was to adopt an explanation furnished by Aristotle for long-distance effects. Aristotle had argued in *On Dreams* (*De insomniis*) that certain kinds of mirrors are covered with a blood-like fog when a menstruating woman looks into them. This is because the air between eyes and mirror is moved and affected by the woman and thus functions as a medium.[45] Another solution was to assume that the soul emits material particles – a solution advanced by the Arabic philosopher Alkindi, who claimed in the treatise *On Rays* (*De radiis*) that the bodily spirit of the faculty of imagination emits rays which alter external bodies.[46] The Aristotelian mediation theory was adopted by Thomas Aquinas, the Alkindian extramission theory by Roger Bacon.[47]

Marsilio Ficino in his *Platonic Theology* (*Theologia platonica*) of 1469–74 presents a theory of long-distance effects of the soul which owes much to Avicenna without naming him. He adopts Avicenna's basic principle that the soul is able to influence the matter of its own body just as it can influence the matter of another person's body. But the distinction between sorcerers and prophets is drawn differently. Ficino contrasts the evil effects of imagination



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(*phantasia*), to which belongs the evil eye, with the beneficial effects of reason (*ratio*). The imagination of a malign person can cause fever in a child. This effect happens because the imagining of fever arouses certain bodily spirits in the sorcerer with the effect that fetid vapors are emitted from the sorcerer's eyes and intrude the child's body.[48] Here Ficino clearly sides with the Alkindian tradition of extramission theories. If imagination has such a great power, it is not surprising that the nobler faculty of reason has even more so, says Ficino. The rational souls of some people, for example, are able to heal sick persons, because they are divinely gifted with a perfect balance of humors, live on purified nourishment and are educated piously. Moreover, the rational soul of some people is able to turn its entire rational intention upward, order its imagination to be silent, dismiss the usual paths of reason and, with the help of God, cease to be a soul and instead become an angel.[49] It is apparent that Ficino in the latter part of his theory has dropped the naturalistic traits of Avicenna's theory: God's influence is essential for the rational soul to produce miraculous effects.

There are Renaissance authors who accept Avicenna's theory with fewer modifications. This is particularly true of Andrea Cattani (d. 1506) who – in contrast to most other authors – agrees with Avicenna that the souls of prophets and sorcerers may influence matter without any mediation. In his *On the Causes of Miraculous Effects* (*De causis mirabilium effectuum*), printed *c.* 1502, Cattani argues in explicit adoption of Avicenna's standpoint that the souls of some people are so noble that they are able to influence other bodies without mediation simply on account of their very strong imagination. We call these people prophets, Cattani says. They acquire this disposition through the influence of the stars and through the inspiration of the Holy Ghost.[50] The case of the sorcerers runs parallel to this. They successfully alter other bodies through the evil eye and through incantations by sheer use of their imagination, if it is well prepared through a divine power and through an adequate bodily temperament.[51] It is also possible that these effects come about through the transmission of bodily spirits via the eyes.[52] Cattani closes his treatise with a Christian caveat, as Ficino in fact had also done.[53] It is clear that Avicenna's theory of prophecy remained a naturalistic challenge even if divine influence upon the prophets was added to it. Cattani remarks that almost all of what he had written is in disagreement with the faith and with truth. He therefore refers his readers to a *quaestio fidei* (which does not seem to be extant) in which he refutes all errors on this matter.[54] Cattani's concluding remarks are in open disagreement with the programmatic praise of Avicenna in his dedication: "Among the philosophers' standpoints which we have come to know we have found none which is closer to the true faith than the standpoint of Avicenna."[55]



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It is noteworthy that the Renaissance discussion does not differentiate between prophecy by imagination and prophecy by will-power, as Avicenna had done. This is a tendency which dates back to the thirteenth century.[56] Cattani in fact also integrates the third Avicennian kind of prophethood into his treatise when he explains that the prophets gifted with extraordinary imagination also receive all abstract knowledge from the intelligences. For Cattani, the prophetic power rested ultimately on the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. The Turin physician Pietro Bairo (d. 1558) adopted Avicenna's theory without this Christianizing addition. In his early *Small Treatise on the Plague* (*Opusculum de pestilentia*) of 1507, Bairo uses Avicenna to support his own view that a powerful imagination may have a considerable effect on its own plague-stricken body if the person is much afraid of death. This is very probable, says Bairo, in view of the fact that a powerful imagination is able to alter the body even of a different person, as Avicenna holds. Bairo gives lengthy quotations from Avicenna's *De anima*, including the *exemplum* of a person balancing on a plank of wood, as well as passages on the evil eye, the healing of the sick, and the production of fertile seasons. The term *propheta* is avoided, but otherwise the theory is not hedged around with any reservations.[57]

Pietro Pomponazzi's treatise *On the Causes of Natural Effects, or, On Incantations* (*De naturalium effectuum causis sive de incantationibus*) of 1520 draws on Ficino's and Cattani's treatments of the topic. In many respects, this is a provocative piece of work – as was his earlier treatise on the mortality of the soul. Pomponazzi's main target is the popular belief that miracles, which break with the ordinary course of nature, are produced by angels and demons. He reasons as follows: there are changes in the material world which result from invisible causes, such as the invisible qualities of certain stones, of the torpedo fish, etc. Such occult qualities exist in an enormous number of cases. Occasionally, intelligent people who know about these effects use them to impress and deceive ordinary people, who attribute the effects to angels and demons.[58] An example is the recent miracle in the Italian town of Aquila, where the image of a saint appeared in the sky when the people of the town had sent fervent prayers to the saint. If we follow Avicenna, says Pomponazzi, the effect comes about only by the sheer will of the people of Aquila. The "Peripatetic explanation," however, is that the effect was the result of the transmission of vapors from the people to the sky – Pomponazzi thus shows his sympathies for an extramission theory.[59] The most rational (*magis sensatus*) explanation is that the image in the sky was not, in fact, the image of the saint.[60] It is apparent that Pomponazzi's standpoint is much influenced by Avicenna's, but that it is modified according to the Aristotelian principle that there is no causation without contact.



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A fervent critique of this Avicennian tradition, especially of Ficino and Pomponazzi, was launched by the Protestant theologian Thomas Erastus (d. 1583) of Heidelberg in the *Disputations Concerning the New Medicine of Paracelsus*, first published in 1572. Erastus argues that imagination cannot exert any influence upon matter, since its sole function is the representation of images.[61] The mediation and extramission theories are refuted as well: the vapors and *spiritus* are too thin and fine to produce fog on a mirror. It can be easily shown by an everyday experiment that mirrors are never misted up with red fog when menstruating women look into them.[62] The same applies to the evil eye: because the *spiritus* are so fine, they would disintegrate as soon as they leave the eye. Moreover, it is unclear how the *spiritus* could be steered towards their target after having departed from the eyes. In truth, says Erastus, if there are really cases of harms produced over a distance, they are the work of the devil.[63] It is curious to see that these arguments, which are partly based on experience and common sense, are advanced by a conservative theologian whose theory culminates in reintroducing the devil into miracle theory. Erastus explicitly singles out Avicenna as the philosopher who has misled others to adopt an erroneous theory of prophecy.[64]

Thomas Erastus, Michel de Montaigne, and Blaise Pascal, among others, all use Avicenna's argument of the tree trunk (they probably draw on Pietro Bairo); Montaigne and Pascal do this silently. While Erastus is skeptical about the explanatory force of the argument,[65] Montaigne and Pascal adapt it to a different, anti-Stoic context: they use it to show that the intellect of even the wisest philosopher is overtaken by the senses, when a person is forced to balance on a plank which leads from one tower of the Cathedral of Notre Dame to the other (Montaigne)[66] or which covers a gorge (Pascal).[67] Montaigne, in fact, prolongs the Avicennian tradition also by taking the position that imagination, if it is in vehement agitation, is powerful enough to influence the bodies of other persons and cause illnesses, as if emitting arrows.[68]

## Spontaneous generation and the ontology of forms

The metaphysical debates of the later Middle Ages were dominated by three major works: Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, Avicenna's *Metaphysics*, and Averroes' *Long Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*. Many issues and arguments came directly from the Arabic sources, such as the distinction between essence and existence, the theory of primary concepts, or the question whether God or being *qua* being is the subject matter of metaphysics. The latter topic continues to be formulated within Arabic parameters in the sixteenth century. When Francisco Suárez begins his well-known



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*Metaphysical Disputations* (*Disputationes metaphysicae*) with a first section on the proper subject matter of metaphysics, he enumerates and refutes six positions, finally siding with a seventh. One of the refuted positions is attributed to Averroes and his *Long Commentary on the Physics*: that the proper subject matter is "the only supreme real being, namely God" (*solum supremum ens reale, Deum videlicet*). Suárez' own conclusion is that being *qua* being is the proper subject matter. Both Avicenna and Averroes (this time the *Long Commentary on the Metaphysics*) are quoted as authorities that support this position.[69]

Since scholarly work on the reception of Arabic metaphysics in the Renaissance has only just begun, it is impossible to give a survey; instead, the focus will be on a particular topic. A prominent field of Arabic influence in Renaissance metaphysics is spontaneous generation.[70] When a living being is generated spontaneously, it arises from matter without there being any parents. An often cited example from antiquity onward was the generation of worms from decaying matter (*generatio per putrefactionem*). Aristotle had argued in *Metaphysics* VII.9 (1034b5–8) that natural beings which can be generated spontaneously are those whose matter is capable of self-movement – in imitation of the movement which in sexual reproduction is introduced from outside through the seed.[71] Themistius, the fourth-century AD commentator on Aristotle, argued that spontaneous generation is a challenge to the Aristotelian principle that all things are generated from their likes in form. Themistius concludes that spontaneous generation can only be explained with a Platonic theory of forms. In a very early time of history, he says, separately existing forms were planted into the earth by a higher cause. It is from these forms within the earth that animals can be generated spontaneously.[72]

It was well known in the Renaissance that Avicenna and Averroes took opposing views on the issue. In a small section *On Floods* (*De diluviis*) of the meteorological part of *The Healing* (*al-Shifāʾ*), Avicenna discusses global catastrophies, which reoccur in history – this again is a topic inherited from antiquity.[73] *On Floods* contains an explanation of how animals and human beings are generated again after their complete extinction: their generation is the result of a series of ever-refined mixtures of elementary qualities. When a certain level is reached, the "giver of forms" (*wāhib al-Ṣuwar, dator formarum*) delivers forms to adequately prepared pieces of matter. The giver of forms, the lowest of the celestial intelligences, is an important and well-known part of Avicenna's ontology. It is not a god, since it reacts automatically when an adequate level of mixture is reached. For Avicenna, in contrast to Aristotle, the form of an animal or a human being is not eternal, but is generated by a separate principle, the giver of forms.[74]



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This theory is rejected by Averroes, who returns to the Aristotelian tenet that forms are not subject to generation or decay. His own position in the *Long Commentary on the Metaphysics* is that the power of the celestial bodies takes the role of the power which is in the parental semen. The degree of the celestial influence depends upon the movements and relative positions of the Sun and the other planets. Averroes thus gives an astrological twist to the theory. In explicit contrast to Avicenna, Averroes denies the possibility of human beings being generated spontaneously. Strictly speaking, natural kinds can never be generated spontaneously, because the result of such processes is not a natural, but a monstrous, unnatural being.[75]

By the time the topic reached the Renaissance, it had been the subject of much lively discussion in late medieval scholasticism. A good example of what had become the mainstream position is the solution advanced by Antonio Trombetta (d. 1517), professor of metaphysics *in via Scoti* ("in the Scotist tradition") at Padua University, in his question commentary on the *Metaphysics*. Trombetta presents Averroes and Avicenna as holding extreme opinions on spontaneous generation: according to Averroes no animal can be generated spontaneously, while for Avicenna all animals, even human beings, can. Instead, argues Trombetta, one ought to follow a middle course (*tenenda est media via*), by holding that only imperfect animals can be generated spontaneously, while human beings cannot. When spontaneous generation happens, it is the result of a power induced into matter by the Sun and the other stars.[76] The ultimate source of this theory of spontaneous generation is Thomas Aquinas. Thomas had followed Averroes in making celestial bodies the decisive factor in spontaneous generation, but he had distanced himself from Averroes in formulating the *media via* theory.[77] This tradition was continued in the Renaissance, for instance, by the Portuguese Jesuit philosopher and theologian Pedro da Fonseca (d. 1599), who devotes entire chapters to the standpoints of Avicenna and Averroes, but sides with Thomas Aquinas.[78]

In the milieu of the arts faculty of Padua, there is a greater variance of positions. Agostino Nifo follows Averroes' (and thus Thomas's) view on the role of the celestial bodies in spontaneous generation, but he adds an important qualification in his second *Metaphysics* commentary of the 1530s: "What Averroes says is not true, even though it appears to be Peripatetic. We have explained in the *Clarifier* [*Dilucidarium*] how the form can be produced by the intelligences and by God himself without the mediation of a celestial body."[79] Nifo distinguishes (in the early *Metaphysics* commentary entitled *Dilucidarium*) between a Peripatetic and Christian standpoint on the issue. The Peripatetics rely on the principles that generation and decay always involve bodies and that nothing is generated from nothing. "Thus,



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Averroes' arguments are valid if his principles are presupposed. But if we speak in a Christian manner, all these principles are false."[80] The reason is that God is able to produce changes which happen *ex nihilo* and without any material alteration. The insertion of a Christian caveat in a philosophical context is typical of Renaissance Aristotelianism, as we have seen above with Cattani's views on the force of imagination. In this case, it also is a prolongation of a medieval tradition, since it was John Duns Scotus who had first pointed to the conflicting views of philosophers and theologians on the issue of spontaneous generation.[81]

A new chapter in the history of spontaneous generation theory was opened when a group of northern Italian Aristotelians turned to Avicenna: Pietro Pomponazzi, Paolo Ricci, and Tiberio Russiliano (Rosselli). Pomponazzi discusses the issue in many different lectures and writings from 1502 to 1522, most of which are not yet accessible in print.[82] As is apparent from a lecture on the *Physics* of 1518, Pomponazzi deviates from the *media via* theory and explicitly embraces Avicenna's view that human life can be generated spontaneously. Avicenna was moved to develop this position by experience and argument, says Pomponazzi. The argument was astrological in nature: as a result of certain conjunctions of planets there have been great catastrophes in world history that have extinguished all life. With the return of beneficial conjunctions, human beings and other animals were born from putrefying matter. From experience we observe countless instances of generation without sexual reproduction. Pomponazzi concludes that Averroes' arguments against Avicenna cannot convince (but Pomponazzi adds a Christian caveat by saying that he is going to follow the *opinio Latinorum*, i.e. the opinion of the theologians).[83] Pomponazzi thus adopts Avicenna's theory from *On Floods*, but combines it with the most popular astrological theory of the times, the theory of great conjunctions. Avicenna had admitted the possibility that the occurrence of catastrophic events was dependent upon celestial constellations, but his explanation of spontaneous generation does not involve the stars: it is solely based on the concept of increasingly refined mixtures of elements.

Paolo Ricci and Tiberio Russiliano were both students of Pomponazzi. Ricci adopts and defends the Avicennian theory against Averroes' criticism in a publication of 1514; his version of the theory is less astrological than Pomponazzi's and thus closer in spirit to Avicenna's original idea. In Ricci's eyes, the "great Peripatetic of the Arabs, Avicenna," has demonstrated with solid arguments that "from a certain mixture of elements the forms of human beings as well as of other animals arise" after flood or fire catastrophes, which extinguish all plants and animals.[84] Tiberio Russiliano, in a series of public disputations of 1519, defended a number of provocative



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philosophical theories on the value of magical knowledge about Christ, on the eternity of the world, or on the Trinity – and barely escaped the inquisitorial proceeding which ensued. His fifth disputation defends Avicenna's theory of the spontaneous generation of human beings as most probable philosophically and as being in accordance both with Aristotle and Plato. Just as in Ricci's case, Tiberio's account does not adopt the astrological emphasis added by Pomponazzi to Avicenna's theory. Tiberio enriches the discussion by pointing to the recent discoveries of unknown islands, which are inhabited by human beings who could not have reached these islands by boat; hence they must have been born from the Earth and the Sun. This must also be true of the first human being ever, at least "if we discuss the case in purely natural terms."[85]

These examples show that Avicenna's theories of prophecy and of spontaneous generation contained much provocative potential. Some Renaissance philosophers employed them in order to challenge traditional religious or theological views.

## Arabic philosophy and humanism

It was mentioned above that Averroes did not have a good press among humanist authors. Many partisans of the humanist movement were highly critical of the entire Arabic tradition in the West. It was often claimed that the medieval translations of Arabic authors were not reliable and that they were written in a barbaric Latin. Also, it was argued that the Arabic philosophers and scientists did not know Greek, and that, if there was anything original in Arabic texts, it was plagiarized from Greek authors read in translation.[86] The anti-Arabic polemics were particulary fervent in the medical context, where humanists attempted to replace Avicenna and Mesue with Galen and Dioscorides.[87] These polemics had a long afterlife, and a number of prejudices, even if obviously unwarranted, such as charges of plagiarism, continue to color modern scholarship on the Renaissance.

In spite of the general antagonism between the humanist movement and the Arabic tradition of philosophy, there were still points of contact. The aristocratic patrons of the new Arabic–Latin or Hebrew–Latin translations, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, the later cardinal Domenico Grimani, and the later bishop Ercole Gonzaga, had close ties to the philosophical climate of the University of Padua, but at the same time shared many humanist ideals.[88] Grimani, in fact, because of his collection of Greek manuscripts, was much admired among humanists. The Hebrew–Latin translators Paolo Ricci and Jacopo Mantino wrote their translations in a classicizing Latin style. To rescue Arabic science and philosophy for the humanist movement was



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the motive of many Renaissance scholars who produced classicizing revisions of medieval translations of Arabic texts. And, finally, Arabic philosophers were cherished also by humanist Aristotelians, such as, for instance, Francesco Vimercato. We should be careful, therefore, not to adopt too easily the antagonist description of the relation between humanism and Arabic philosophy which we are offered by the polemical literature of the time.

## NOTES

1. For the medieval reception of Arabic philosophy see Burnett 2005, with further literature.
2. Nifo 1503 and Nifo 1559b.
3. Pietro Pomponazzi (MS), *Expositio in librum XII Metaphysicae*. For further manuscripts see Lohr 1988, 349.
4. Zimara 1508, 1537a, 1537b; see again Lohr 1988, 506–7, 511.
5. Aristotle and Averroes 1550–2. The relaunch of this edition in 1562 was reprinted in Frankfurt am Main 1962 and it still forms the basis for modern scholarship on the Latin Averroes, at least for those works that have not yet seen a critical edition. See the informative article on the 1550–2 edition by Schmitt 1984b.
6. On the Renaissance Arabic–Latin and Hebrew–Latin translation movement see Siraisi 1987, 133–43; Tamani 1992, Burnett 1999b, and Hasse 2006.
7. For a full list of Renaissance translations including works of Arabic science see Hasse 2006.
8. Averroes' commentary is on *De partibus animalium* I–IV and *De generatione animalium* I–III, but not on any part of *Historia animalium*. Nifo's commentary covers all three Aristotelian books on animals: see Perfetti 2000, 85–120.
9. The Paduan philosopher Agostino Nifo, for instance, composed a commentary on Averroes' reply to Algazel's *Incoherence of the Philosophers*, and thus indirectly also commented on Algazel; see Nifo 1497.
10. Averroes 1953. A few Arabic fragments in Hebrew letters have been preserved; see Sirat and Geoffroy 2005.
11. Averroes 1953, 391, lines 127–40, and 393, lines 176–95 (on Themistius), 395, esp. lines 228–35 (on Alexander) (III.5).
12. Ibid., 387, line 23, to 388, line 56.
13. Ibid., 404, line 500, to 405, line 520.
14. Ibid., 400, lines 379–93, 401, lines 419–23, and 412, lines 724–8.
15. On medieval Averroism see Hayoun and de Libera 1991.
16. Aquinas 1994, 134.
17. Piché 1999, 88 (art. 32/117).
18. Kuksewicz 1995.
19. Kuksewicz 1997, 96.
20. On Renaissance Averroism see the classic, but prejudiced study by Renan 1861, and the more recent work by Kristeller 1965b, Schmitt 1984b, Mahoney 2000, Hasse 2004a and 2004b, Martin 2007; on Renaissance intellect theory in general see Kessler 1988.
21. Aristotle, *De generatione animalium* 736b27–8 (2.3).



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22. Paul of Venice 1503, fol. 88va.
23. Ibid., fol. 88ra, *quarta conclusio* (V.36); see also fol. 89ra, *ad tertium*.
24. Paul of Venice 1481, sig. Z8ra (III.27), quoted from Kuksewicz 1983, I: 302.
25. The *Quaestio* has survived only in manuscript; see Vernia (MS). Extracts from this manuscript are quoted in Hasse 2004a, 135–7. On Vernia and Nifo see the collected articles by Mahoney 2000.
26. Vernia (MS), fol. 156rb.
27. Vernia (MS), fols. 157vb–157bis ra.
28. See the references in Kristeller 1952; Di Napoli 1963, 63–5 (to Petrarca), 72 (to Salutati), 84 (to Valla); Hankins 1994, 274 (to Ficino); Nardi 1958, 397 (to Faseolo). The passage in Ermolao Barbaro is in Barbaro 1943, I: 92.
29. For the murder story see Hasse 1997, 234–6.
30. Vernia 1505.
31. Ibid., fol. 11rb.
32. Nifo 1554, fols. 33ra–b (III.26).
33. Ibid., fols. 33va–34ra (III.28).
34. Ibid., fols. 34ra–b (III.29).
35. See the references in Mahoney 2000, article I, 201.
36. Pomponazzi, in Kristeller 1955, 93.
37. Pomponazzi 1990, IX, 110.
38. Alessandro Achillini, *Quodlibeta de intelligentiis*, in Achillini 1551, III, dub. 2–4.
39. Prassicio 1521; for an attack on Nifo, see e.g. sig. B4va. See Hasse forthcoming 2.
40. Vimercato 1574, 47a.
41. Antonio Bernardi 1560, 546, quoted in Di Napoli 1963, 364–5 (which incorrectly refers to page 564 in Bernardi).
42. This is argued in Hasse 2004b.
43. Rahman 1958, 50. The Latin text is in Avicenna 1968–72, II: 64.
44. On Avicenna's theory of prophecy and its twelfth- and thirteenth-century Latin reception see Hasse 2000, 154–74. On the concept of imagination/phantasy in the history of philosophy from antiquity to 1500 see K. Park's very informative introduction to Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola 1984, 16–43. See also Zambelli 1985.
45. Aristotle, *De insomniis*, 459b23–460a24. The authenticity of the passage is disputed. For a recent defense of its authenticity see Van der Eijk 1994, 183–93.
46. This text has not survived in Arabic. See the Latin edition, Alkindi 1975, 230–1. On its reception see Walker 1958, 147–59, and Burnett 1999a, 20–1.
47. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, qu. 117, a. 3, ad 2. Bacon 1859, 529.
48. Marsilio Ficino 2001–6, 192–5 (13.4.8–9). The classic on Ficino's theory of occult powers is Walker 1958, part I, but see the important modifications by Hankins 2006a, who discusses Avicenna's influence on Ficino. For context see also Copenhaver 1988a.
49. Ficino 2001–6, 196–201 (13.4.10–12).
50. Cattani 1502, sigs. e6r–e7r.
51. Ibid., sigs. e7v–f1r.
52. Ibid., sig. f2v.
53. Ficino 2001–6, 216–17 (13.5.8).
54. Cattani 1502, sig. f8r.
55. Cattani 1502, sig. a2v.



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56. Hasse 2000, 167–8.
57. Bairo 1507, sigs. f5r–f6r (chapter *de cibo et potu*). On Bairo see Thorndike 1923–58, VI: 217–18.
58. Pomponazzi 1567, 21–4. For an interpretation of this work see Pine 1986, 235–74.
59. Pomponazzi 1567, 237–8.
60. Ibid., 253.
61. Erastus 1572, 74. On Erastus see Thorndike 1923–58, VI: 652–67, and Walker 1958, 156–66.
62. Erastus 1572, 91.
63. Ibid., 101–2, 108.
64. Ibid., 115–17.
65. Ibid., 115.
66. Montaigne 1965b, 594 (2.13).
67. Pascal 1946, II, 56.
68. Montaigne 1965b, 104–5 (1.21).
69. Suárez 1866, I: 1–12. The quotation is from p. 4.
70. On spontaneous generation in the Arabic and Latin tradition see Nardi 1965a; Kruk 1990; Van der Lugt 2004, 131–87; Hasse forthcoming 1.
71. Spontaneous generation is also discussed in Aristotle's biological work; the most comprehensive passage is in *De generatione animalium* 762a9–b32 (3.11).
72. Themistius' paraphrase of Book XII of the *Metaphysics* has not survived in Greek, but only in long Arabic quotations by Averroes and in a complete Hebrew version, which was translated from the Arabic in AD 1255. See the English translation of the quotations in Averroes' *Long Commentary on the Metaphysics* (on 1070a24) in Genequand 1986, 105–7.
73. See, for example, Plato, *Politicus* 269Bff., 271Aff.; Plato, *Timaeus* 22C, 23A–B. Aristotle does not share the conviction that immense famines or floods point to the fact that there have been past destructions of mankind; these catastrophes were of local character only; see *Meteorology* 352a17ff. (2.14).
74. Avicenna, *De diluviis*, edited in Alonso Alonso 1949, 291–319 (see 306–8).
75. See the English translation of Averroes' commentary on *Metaphysics* XII.3 in Genequand 1986, 94 and 111. Of the commentary on *Metaphysics* VII.9 there is only one translation into a Western language, the Latin translation Aristotle and Averroes 1562, VIII: fol. 180r–1v (VII.31).
76. Trombetta 1504, fol. 58vb.
77. Aquinas 1950, 344 (§§ 1399–1403).
78. Fonseca 1615–29, II: 246–55 (VII, vii, qu. 1 and 2). On Fonseca see also chapter 13 below.
79. Nifo 1559b, 431b (VII, text. 31): "Sed haec an vera sint, petenda sunt a Dilucidario, ubi declaravimus haec quae Averroes ait non esse vera, licet videantur peripatetica. Illic enim explicavimus quonam modo ab intelligentiis et ab ipso deo effici possit forma sine interventu corporis coelestis."
80. Nifo 1559c, 195a: "Et sic rationes Averrois sunt valide suppositis principiis eius. Sed si loquimur catholicae, omnia haec principia sunt falsa."
81. Scotus 1999, 1252–3 (qu. 7).
82. Extracts are published in Nardi 1965a. See also the references in Zambelli 1994, 81–2.



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83. Nardi 1965a, 315–19.
84. Ricci 1514, sig. i3r.
85. Russiliano 1994, 170–83 (disp. 5); the quotation is from p. 175: "cum phisice tantum disputemus." I am grateful to Bernd Roling and Henrik Wels for drawing my attention to these passages in Ricci and Tiberio Russiliano.
86. See n. 28 above. Ficino, for instance, blames Averroes for his ignorance of Greek and for having read Aristotle in bad translations in a "barbarous tongue," i.e. Arabic, in *Platonic Theology* 15.1.2 (Ficino 2001–6, v: 9).
87. Siraisi 1987, 65–76.
88. Hasse 2006.



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## Appendix: Renaissance Latin translations of Arabic philosophy (1450–1700)*

| | |
|---|---|
| Elia del Medigo (d. 1493), Venice, Padua, Florence, transl. from **H**ebrew | Averroes:<br>Comp. Meteor. + Comm. med. Meteor. (fragm.), 1488<br>Comm. mag. Metaph. Prooem XII (two times), 1488<br>Quaest. in An. pr., 1497<br>Comm. med. Metaph. I–VII, 1560<br>Comm. med. Animal. (MS Vat. lat. 4549)<br>Epitome of Plato's *Republic*, 1992 (ed. A. Coviello)<br>*Tractatus de intellectu speculativo* (MS Vat. lat. 4549) |
| Anonymous Hebrew scholar **H** | Averroes<br>Comm. med. An. (MS Vat. lat. 4551)<br>Algazel<br>*Liber intentionum philosophorum* with commentary by Moses of Narbonne (MS Vat. lat. 4554) |
| Anonymous Hebrew scholar attached to Pico della Mirandola (before 1493) **H** | Ibn Ṭufayl:<br>*Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* (MS Genoa Bibl. Univ. A.IX.29) |
| Andrea Alpago (d. 1522), Damascus, transl. from **A**rabic | Avicenna:<br>*Compendium de anima* . . ., 1546 |
| Giovanni Burana (d. before 1523), Padua **H** | Averroes:<br>Comp. An. pr., 1524<br>Comm. med. An. pr., 1524<br>Comm. med. An. post., 1550/2<br>Comm. mag. An. post., 1550/2 |
| Abraham de Balmes (d. 1523), Venice, Padua **H** | Avempace:<br>*Epistola expeditionis* (MS Vat. lat. 3897)<br>Alfarabi:<br>*De intellectu* (MS Vat. lat. 12055) |



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| | |
|---|---|
| | Averroes: |
| | Comp. Org., 1523 |
| | *Quaesita logica*, 1523 |
| | Comm. mag. An. post., 1523 |
| | Comm. med. Top., 1523 |
| | Comm. med. Soph. El., 1523 |
| | Comm. med. Rhet., 1523 |
| | Comm. med. Poet., 1523 |
| | Comp. Gen., 1552 |
| | Comp. An., 1552 |
| | Comp. Parv. nat., 1552 |
| | Comm. med. Phys. (MS Vat. lat. 4548) |
| | *Quaesita naturalia* (MS Vat. ottob. lat. 2060) |
| | *De substantia orbis* cap. 6–7, 1550/2 |
| | *Liber modorum rationis de opinionibus legis* (MS Vat. ottob. lat. 2060, MS Milan Ambros. G. 290) |
| Calo Calonymos ben David (d. after 1526), Venice **H** | Averroes: |
| | *Destructio destructionum*, 1527 |
| | *Epistola de connexione intellectus abstracti cum homine*, 1527 |
| Vitalis Nisso (d. ?) **H** | Averroes: |
| | Comp. Gen., 1550/2 |
| Paolo Ricci (d. 1541), Padua and Pavia **H** | Averroes: |
| | Comm. med. Cael., 1511 |
| | Comm. mag. Metaph. Prooem. XII, 1511 |
| Jacopo Mantino (d. 1549), Bologna, Venice, Rome **H** | Averroes: |
| | Comm. med. Animal., 1521 |
| | Comp. Metaph., 1521 |
| | Comm. med. Isag., 1550/2 |
| | Comm. med. Cat., 1550/2 |
| | Comm. med. Int., 1550/2 |
| | Comm. med. Top. I–IV, 1550/2 |
| | Comm. med. Poet., 1550/2 |
| | Comm. med. Phys., 1550/2 |
| | Comm. mag. Phys. Prooem., 1550/2 |
| | Comm. mag. An. III.5 + 36, 1550/2 |



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| | |
|---|---|
| | Comm. mag. An. post. (fragm.), 1562<br>Epitome of Plato's *Republic*, 1539 |
| Tommaso Obicini of Novara (d. 1632), Rome **A** | Al-Abharī:<br>*Isagoge . . . in scientiam logices*, 1625 |
| Johann Buxtorf Jr. (d. 1664), Basel **H** | Maimonides:<br>*Liber mōre nevūkīm*, 1629 |
| Edward Pococke Sr. (d. 1691) and Edward Pococke Jr., Oxford **A** | Ibn Ṭufayl:<br>*Epistola . . . de Hai Ebn Yokdhan*, 1671 |

* On these translations, see the literature referred to in n. 6. Not included are Moses Arovas, Pier Nicola Castellani, and Jacques Charpentier, who translated and later revised the Neoplatonic *Theology of Aristotle* (pseudo): see Kraye 1986, 265–86.



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# 8

BRIAN P. COPENHAVER

# How to do magic, and why: philosophical prescriptions

## Philosophy, physiology, and medicine

After Marsilio Ficino published it in 1489, his *Three Books on Life* enjoyed great success. Almost thirty editions by 1647 made it the most influential account of magic of its day, perhaps of all Western history.[1] *De vita libri tres* is therefore a monument of Renaissance culture. Like other works of that period, it revives ancient wisdom – the magical learning of ancient Greece and, so Ficino thought, older revelations from Persia and Egypt. But *De vita* applies this primordial knowledge to problems of Ficino's day, showing his contemporaries how to use ordinary natural objects to better themselves in magical ways. Ficino's philosophical magic aims to give people power. But how? To answer that question, we need to know more about the great Platonist and his book.[2]

"Plotinus the philosopher, our contemporary, seemed ashamed of being in the body." This stunning proclamation of ascetic immaterialism opens the *Life* of Plotinus, the first Neoplatonic philosopher, written by Porphyry, his student and successor.[3] Ficino, the last major voice of this tradition, learned to think about magic from the Neoplatonists, sharing the Platonic goal of rising beyond the merely physical and temporal to the bodiless and eternal. But Ficino also practiced medicine and theorized about it, using all his five senses to diagnose the ills of diseased and aging bodies. The ailments that Ficino treated were natural particulars, concrete material phenomena, and so were the cures that he used to heal them. Natural objects – people, animals, plants, and stones – were also the primary topic of Aristotelian natural philosophy. Like the ancient Neoplatonists, Ficino assimilated Aristotelian physics and metaphysics and adapted them to Platonic purposes. As for problems of healing, applying scholastic philosophy to medicine had been normal for three centuries, especially in Italy's two great medical schools of Bologna and Padua.

Ficino learned his academic medicine at home, however, in the small University of Florence.[4] After repeated closures of its tiny medical faculty,



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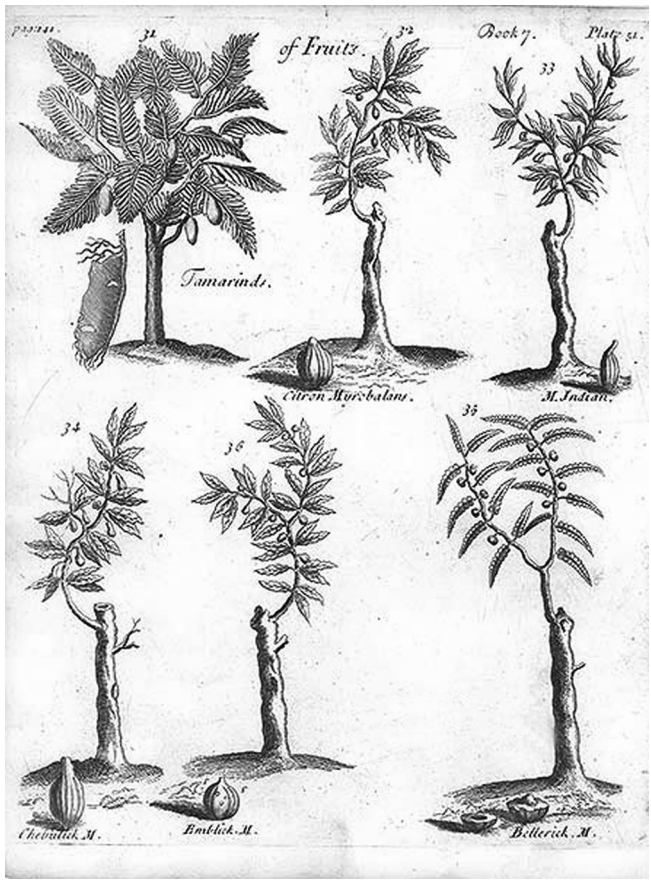


Figure 8.1: Myrobalans

the Medici transferred most medical instruction to Pisa in 1473. Around that time, the young Ficino was one of perhaps three dozen doctors accessible to a city of about 40,000 souls. The scarcity of learned healers gave him more clinical business than his sketchy education justified. And yet much medical knowledge came from outside the classroom, through apprenticeship, professional consultation, and personal experience. Ficino learned in this way from his father, a physician employed by the Medici.[5]

The younger Ficino, practicing a bodily art, became fond of the natural objects called *myrobalans* (Fig. 8.1), one of hundreds of material things recommended as cures in the *Three Books on Life*. Myrobalans are uncommon but natural, unlike some of the fictions that had long sustained belief in magic for educated Europeans: the basilisk, the ship-stopper, and other magical items whose only reality was textual. The ancient Greek word,



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μυροβάλανος, probably did not name the drug that Ficino mentions in three varieties – emblic, chebulic, or Indic and belliric – that correspond to the dried fruits of trees native to south and southeast Asia, fruits still used in traditional medicine: *Emblica officinalis*, *Terminalia chebula*, and *Terminalia bellerica*.[6]

Myrobalans appear often in the *Three Books on Life*, the third of which (*De vita* III), called *How to Get Life from the Heavens*, presents a *philosophical theory* of magic along with *practical advice*. Because Ficino thought of magic as a kind of medicine, it is no surprise that myrobalans are ingredients for magical drugs in *De vita* III. They are fruits full of the quintessence, the unearthly substance located beyond the sphere of the Moon; the power of Jupiter and Mercury makes them a tonic for sensation, memory, and intelligence.[7]

Myrobalans are even more prominent in the first two of the *Three Books on Life*. *On Treating People Constantly Involved in Study* (*De vita* I) deals with a large topic – regimen, diet, and drugs – for a small audience: professional scholars and their doctors, people like Ficino himself. The readership for the second book, *On Long Life* (*De vita* II), was even smaller – scholars of a certain age, also like Ficino. When he published *De vita* in 1489, Ficino was almost fifty-six, with ten years still to live, despite his bad horoscope with Saturn in an unfortunate position.[8] Experience had taught him that astringent myrobalans are good for the stomach, the blood, and a moist constitution. They protect against cold, putrefaction, sluggishness, and forgetfulness, while promoting regularity, longevity, and intelligence. And because they are effective against melancholy, Ficino includes them in several prescriptions meant to cure that dread disease of the learned.[9]

To keep their minds healthy, scholars need healthy bodies. They depend not only on intelligence but also on brains, hearts, livers, and stomachs and, above all, on spirit, which in Ficino's usage is a tenuous but still physical substance, "a pure vapor of blood, light, warm and clear," which is the product of a physical process. The stomach and liver receive food from which they make blood by a physical power (*virtus naturalis*). The lightest blood then passes to the heart and its vital power (*virtus vitalis*) to become spirit. Spirit then travels from the heart to the brain, which has the psychic power (*virtus animalis*) of moving and sensing. Because the matter of spirit is pure and fine, it can link these higher bodily functions with the lower faculties of the immaterial soul.[10]

Although Ficino thought he was original in writing about the health of scholars, the framework for all of his *Three Books on Life* is traditional medicine based on conventional humoral physiology.[11] Unconventionally, however, magic is also a major department of Ficino's medicine. Yet his



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medicine is thoroughly natural, and so is the magic in it. His magical medicine is *physica*, physic, the art and science of a *physicus* whose practice is explained by *natural* philosophy.[12] Medicine of this kind acts on matter. Its operations are physical, not ritual or religious. Although the human patient is a body/soul composite, medical treatment by magic starts with the body, even though the body affects the soul and mind by way of spirit.

At the level of *physics*, the concept governing this medicine is physical temperament, the mixture – balanced or unbalanced – of material elements (fire, air, water, earth) and their qualities (hot, cold, wet, dry), the basic components of all earthly things, including human bodies. There are many balanced temperaments or complexions, however, not just one; they differ by time, place, person, and bodily organ. In each case, some right proportion of elemental ingredients will be healthy, and the wrong ones unhealthy.[13] At the level of *physiology*, the same principle of balance governs the primary fluids that the body needs to live, eat, grow, reproduce, and stay healthy. These four *humors* are products of ingested food, but they also enable the body to take nourishment from what it eats and drinks. The same humors account for physiological complexion, the body's balance in health or imbalance in illness. The *blood* in the veins is mainly humoral blood, but it is mixed with the three other humors: *phlegm*, a secretion coming mainly from the brain, like mucus in color and consistency; *yellow bile*, made by the liver and found in the gall bladder; and *black bile*, whose organ is the spleen.[14]

Scholars are vulnerable to special humoral afflictions. Their intense and prolonged mental activity produces black bile (*atra bilis*), also called *melancholia*, while physical inactivity generates phlegm (*pituita*). Phlegm makes scholars sluggish and depressed, while black bile causes anxiety or even insanity. Melancholics dry out and grow cold, losing warmth and moisture – the moisture that sustains natural warmth. Too much thinking dries the brain and chills it. Spirit made hyperactive by thinking also consumes the lightest part of the blood, leaving it heavy and viscous. Eating the wrong food and not exercising – in general, neglecting the body for the mind – makes the sedentary scholar, and especially the philosopher, melancholic.[15] This physiological calamity is what Ficino calls the "human" cause of melancholy, distinct from the "celestial" cause that flows from the planets Mercury and Saturn. To be active investigators, scholars need the agile Mercury, but they also need the constant Saturn to persevere in their inquiries and retain what they discover. This combination of planetary influences is cold and dry, another vector for the disease of black bile. Right from the start, astrology is the key to Ficino's magical medicine and a source of remedies against melancholy.[16]

Diseases of black bile are overdetermined and complex. Their causes are several, and several kinds of melancholic humor underlie them. The natural



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kind is just "a denser and drier part of the blood," distinct from the four types of burnt (*adustus*) melancholy, which are combustion products, either of natural melancholy or of the three other humors. All the burnt melancholies are bad, agitating those who think for a living before plunging them into depression – a humoral version of bipolar mental illness. By contrast, natural melancholy usually nourishes wisdom and judgment – though erratically. By itself, untempered by other humors, or in the wrong mix with them, natural melancholy runs to extremes and makes scholars weak, torpid, anxious, feverish, or even mad.[17]

The point of Ficino's physic, then, is to produce the right mix of humors for scholars prone (like Ficino himself) to melancholy. The proper balance of humors will be not an equal but a proportionate amount of each – four parts of humoral blood to one each of yellow and black bile, and the black bile must be very thin. The desired result is a composite of these three humors, with a fourth – a lighter type of phlegm – surrounding and flowing into it. This healthful composite produces spirits which are volatile, like fumes from brandy or grappa. The effect is a quick and lasting intelligence congruent with Mercury and Saturn – Saturn especially, highest of the planets and propitious for the divine philosophizing that invites us to escape the body altogether.[18]

The therapy in *De vita* I is mostly regimen and pharmacy, but Ficino's understanding of regimen is expansive. It includes not only the patient's diet but also the air she breathes, the sounds she hears, the sights and colors she sees, the clothes she wears, where she lives, and the people with whom she lives. Regimen also overlaps with pharmacy; drugs and foods are both consumed. Some of Ficino's therapies fall outside these two main classes: bleeding is the only surgical intervention; baths and massage come under regimen; and Ficino also prescribes a kind of ethical psychotherapy.[19]

No sleep in the afternoon after a big meal; no sex on a full stomach; no hard thinking after eating without rest in between. Excessive intercourse, too much wine, bad food, and lack of sleep are special perils for anyone who lives the life of the mind. Bad regimen puts the humors out of balance and the patient out of alignment with the heavens. A scholar who sleeps late will miss the Sun, Mercury, and Venus in the morning sky.[20] The countervailing good regimen is mostly common sense: mix work with relaxation; keep the senses stimulated and the body exercised; breathe clean air and stay warm; avoid cold, fatty, heavy foods; eat lightly, twice a day; and drink light wine.[21]

The theory behind this regimen is physiological: a good humoral complexion will keep the scholar warm and moist, making the spirit healthy enough to do the vital work of linking mind and body. Accordingly, the purpose of Ficino's medications is to eliminate bad humors and restore balance among



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the good ones. The drugs he prescribes are mainly botanical, both simple and compound, the latter sometimes including animal and mineral ingredients.[22] These drugs may be taken directly, like eating a piece of fruit, or they may be processed and compounded to make pills, potions, syrups, salves, and other preparations, preferably slow-acting, moist, and warm. Their use will be indicated by various symptoms: runny nose, weak vision, headache, forgetfulness, sleeplessness, and unpleasant sensations of taste.[23]

In the case of melancholy, Ficino recommends various preparations to provide warmth and moisture against this dry, cold ailment. These include pills to be taken with a syrup twice a year, in spring and fall. One pill, for delicate patients, is "golden or magical, partly imitating the Magi, partly my own invention, compounded under the influence of Jupiter and Venus to draw out phlegm, yellow bile and black bile . . . sharpening and brightening the spirits." The ingredients, blended with wine for processing, are gold dust or gold leaf, frankincense, myrrh, saffron, aloe, cinnamon, citron, balm, silk, ben, purple rose, red sandalwood, coral, and all three kinds of myrobalans.[24]

## Geriatrics, astrology, and amulets

"Among physicians," wrote the learned Rhazes, "those are wise who agree that everything relating to times, air, waters, complexions and diseases is changed by the motions of the planets."[25] In 1345, the planets were portentous and malign. Three conjunctions involving Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn, along with an eclipse of the Moon, occurred in March of that year, leading people to look heavenward for the source of the great pestilence that struck in 1347. This and later pandemics seized the attention of European physicians, who produced nearly three hundred treatises on the plague by 1500.[26] Ficino added his *Consilium against Pestilence* to this collection in 1481.[27]

Bad stars and planets make bad air, which breeds plague: this was a common view of the Black Death and of subsequent visitations of that awful disease. A destructive configuration of planets and stars gave doctors and patients a general explanation of the countless deaths, while bad horoscopes and weak complexions distinguished the individual dead from the survivors. Such applications of astrology had been built into Western medicine from the beginning. Astrology was a kind of divination, and so was medical prognostication, which not only recognized larger rhythms of climate and seasons but also noticed smaller details of personal nativities and chronologies of specific diseases – phases of illness tracked through favorable and critical days, keyed to cycles of the Moon and calculated numerologically.[28]

Plague struck Florence for the eleventh time in 1478, the year when Ficino's second great patron – Lorenzo de' Medici (1449–92) – escaped an



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unnatural death in the Pazzi conspiracy. "Lorenzo's good health is the first I would take care of," wrote Ficino in the prefatory letter to *De vita* I. And it was Lorenzo who received the dedication of the whole work *On Life* from this priest and philosopher, who was also a physician with "two fathers, the medical Ficino and Cosimo de' Medici."[29] The practical healer who published a vernacular plague book in 1481 was also thinking about melancholy scholars and their ills – writing the text that would become *De vita* I. *De vita* II had to wait eight years more. Ficino may have intended it to put *De vita* III, the least traditional of the three books, in a more conventional therapeutic framework.[30] That astrology is a theme linking all these works is evident from citations of the *Consilium* in the third book of *On Life*, a more adventurous text on medical magic.[31] The magic of *De vita* III, however, is continuous with the physical and physiological theory of *De vita* I and II and with clinical practices based on it. *De vita* I is normal medicine, meant for the special population of scholars, and like most medicine of its day it includes astrological prescriptions. For older scholars, *De vita* II offers even more specialized advice, and also more astrology.

Old age begins at forty-nine or fifty, says Ficino, and by age sixty-three or seventy the body's vital moisture has dried up. Strong remedies are advised. A dry old man should suck milk, stabilized with fennel, from a healthy, happy young girl when the Moon is waxing. He might even drink a little blood from the left arm of a young man, also happy and healthy, in the same phase of the Moon.[32] Myrobalans, a less extravagant option,

> dry up excessive moisture in an amazing way ... collecting natural moisture and protecting it against both decay and inflammation, thus prolonging life ... [they] concentrate, warm and strengthen the natural and psychic power and spirit with astringent and aromatic force. From this anyone would think that the Tree of Life in Paradise might have been a myrobalan.[33]

But the theory underlying the use of this wonderful fruit and of Ficino's more dramatic remedies comes, once again, from conventional physics and physiology. In general, when the blood is too thick or too thin and spirit is deficient or volatile, the best therapy is moderation. Ficino therefore advises his patients to use medicine and astrology to "construct for yourselves the temperament that nature did not provide."[34] How does he know which items to prescribe? By consulting established medical authorities, other physicians and his own experience. One point of consensus among the authorities was that astrology is indispensable, a common view confirmed by Ficino's practice of his craft.[35] Accordingly, we find astrological medicine throughout the *Three Books on Life* but more of it in the second book than in the first and much more in the third.



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Some of the astrology in *De vita* II is specific information on preparing medicines or on regimen, and some of it lays out the theory behind the instructions, including the old analogy between the human microcosm and the universal macrocosm that Ficino will repeat and expand in *De vita* III. This ancient topic arises in a discussion of procreation, of which the old must be wary in both its forms – physical and mental, Venereal and Saturnine. Because Venus dissipates the spirit and Saturn suffocates it, the best course will be a mean between them, a therapeutic connection with the Sun and Jupiter, which are above Venus but below Saturn.[36] Nonetheless, the god whom Ficino introduces to warn his older patients against Saturn and Venus is Mercury:

> Just as I have warned you to beware of crafty Venus with her charms of touch and taste, so you should be wary of Saturn and of taking the same delight in contemplative thought ... for in that thought Saturn often devours his own children ... She makes the body fertile ... and, when the mind is pregnant with his seed, he forces it to give birth ... Keep using the reins of prudence to restrain the lust for either god's begetting ... to keep human life in a certain just proportion of soul and body, feeding each with its own foods ... wine, mint, myrobalan, musk, amber, new ginger, frankincense, aloes, jacinth and stones or plants like them.[37]

The old must conserve the vital juices that Venus consumes, "gradually draining you through a hidden tube of some kind, begetting another thing and filling it with your fluids, until she leaves you spent on the ground like the old husk of a cicada."[38] Venereal pleasures of touch and taste rank lowest among the seven that Ficino lists (Fig. 8.2), pleasures experienced through the five external senses of the body and two internal faculties of the soul. Touch and taste belong to infancy and youth, the first two of five phases of life, dominated either by sense alone or by sense more than reason. In the last

| *Ages* | *Faculties* | *Planetary gods* | *Pleasures* | *Site* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Sense | Venus | Touch | External |
| 2 | Sense > reason | Venus | Taste | External |
| 3 | Sense = reason | Mercury | Smell | External |
| 4 | Sense < reason | Mercury | Hearing | External |
| 5 | Reason | Mercury | Sight | External |
| | | Mercury | Imagination | Internal |
| | | Mercury | Reason | Internal |

Figure 8.2: Pleasures and planets



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ages, the fourth and fifth, sensation has either bowed to reason or disappeared entirely, excluding Venus and making Mercury the better guide for the elderly.[39]

Actually, Venus exits the series of pleasures even earlier, when touch and taste in the first two ages give way to smell and hearing in the next. What touch and taste seem to have in common is contact, but in the ordinary psychology of Ficino's day what they share is the same *medium* – the flesh that makes contact with external objects and lies next to the world and the devil.[40] Pleasures of smell and hearing are higher and safer, and their common medium is air, which is

> always and very easily influenced by qualities of things below and in the heavens ... and converts us to its quality in a wondrous way – our spirit especially ... Indeed, the quality of this air is of the greatest importance for thinkers whose work depends mainly on spirit of the same kind, which is why choosing pure and luminous air, smells and music concerns them more than anyone else.[41]

The old, who find solid food hard to digest, can take nourishment from its odor, from vapors of wine and from the air itself, which is like spirit. Moreover, since we sense sounds through the same airy and spiritual medium that carries vapors and odors, Ficino locates music in this same gradient of therapeutic pleasures governed by Mercury.[42]

Ficino moves easily from this astro-mythical theorizing to catalogs of pharmaceuticals. Like all the *Three Books on Life*, *De vita* II gives the reader an abundance of practical advice – recipes, prescriptions, instructions, and shopping-lists. Although plants outnumber other substances, gems and metals also appear. Gold is a favorite ingredient: along with silver, coral, electrum, and other precious stones and metals, it has the double property of temperately expanding and condensing the spirit while also brightening it. Since these minerals were formed deep within the earth by heavenly power, that same power is strong enough to stay with them and keep them connected to the heavens.[43] Myrobalans, whose astringent force condenses the spirit, have the power of fruit from Paradise, but it was gold that the Magi carried to Christ. "All authorities recommend gold above everything else," Ficino claims, "consecrated to the Sun because of brightness and to Jupiter for balance, so that it has an amazing ability to regulate natural heat with moisture and introduce solar and jovial power into the spirits and limbs."[44] Despite its marvelous properties, however, gold is a hard substance, like all metals and gems, and special steps must be taken when introducing hard things into the body's soft tissues and fluids. Ficino prescribes gold leaf or gold dust cooked in wine with sugar and various plants



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"when the Moon is coming into Leo, Aries or Sagittarius in the aspect of the Sun and Jupiter."[45]

Such celestial configurations were thought to govern the body in many ways. Knowing that astrologers had often devised planetary patterns of hours, days, and months, Ficino recommended another temporal arrangement to his older patients, applying the sequence of Moon (1), Mercury (2), Venus (3), Sun (4), Mars (5), Jupiter (6) and Saturn (7) to the first seven years of life and then repeating it. Septenary years ruled from afar by Saturn will be dangerous because that planet is so remote from earthly affairs and because descending from so high up in one year, and down so low to the Moon in the next, will be abrupt. Although these climacteric years are special hazards for the old, the authorities agree that fate fixes no term of life that cannot be adjusted by "the devices of astrology and help from physicians." Hence, Ficino's advice near the end of *De vita* II is "to ask the doctors what diet suits you naturally and the astrologers what star favors your life. When this star is well situated, and the Moon with it, combine the ingredients that you have learned to be good for you . . . Besides all this," he adds, "Ptolemy and other teachers of astronomy promise a long and prosperous life from certain images made from various stones and metals under a particular star."[46]

This new topic of astrological images leads Ficino to the last of his *Three Books on Life* and its daring exploration of talismanic and musical magic. The risks in discussing images, much less recommending them, were several: from tradition, ethics, and philosophy. To grasp these dangers, we need a distinction among objects of three kinds: let us call them *stones*, *amulets*, and *talismans*, stipulating that the first are any small bits of hard mineral; the second undecorated stones worn on the body; and the third amulets decorated with words or pictures.[47]

To be cured by a stone – a piece of crystalline salt, for example – Ficino's patient might either consume it or wear it. Ingested as medicine, the stone would be an ordinary drug like any other, morally harmless. But the long tradition of Christian teaching since St. Augustine had registered strong suspicion of stones worn on the body.[48] If a stone is not swallowed, how can it act on the body? Perhaps by contact or proximity or by a link with some other physical object, like a star or planet. Ficino preferred the last answer, of course.[49] But others saw demons lurking behind objects used by godless heathens to protect themselves from disease and devils. Even in all innocence and with the best intentions, wearing an amulet might invite a demon to invade the body of the person wearing it.

If the dangers of amulets were obvious, carving words or images on a stone was even worse. To whom are words on talismans addressed? These special messages are not meant for living humans. And if God or angels or saints



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are addressed, talismans will need to be blessed by the Church. The only other nonhuman persons available to receive messages are Satan and his demons. If images without words decorate talismans, the parallel question arises: images of whom or what and approved by whom? Images of the old gods, including planetary gods, are idolatrous, like statues in a pagan temple. Animal images may also be idols since beasts had been worshiped by the pagans.

Hence, from the point of view of the Christian doctrine that shaped Ficino's conduct, amulets were bad and talismans worse. Natural philosophy and metaphysics might complicate these problems or, as Ficino hoped, resolve them. To what physical or metaphysical category does an image on a stone belong? Are there purely natural ways to make connections with stars and planets by using amulets or talismans? Since words communicate with other persons, who are the persons addressed by words engraved on a stone? And what consequences follow from putting words in songs? For music and song are also therapies in the risky magical medicine of *De vita* II. "You who want to lengthen life in the body should first of all refine the spirit," advised Ficino. "Enrich the blood with enriching foods for blood that is tempered and clear; always keep it warm with the best air; nourish it daily with sweet smells; and delight it with sounds and songs." Song is delightful, but also dangerous. Its words, like those of a hymn or a prayer, are spoken to someone. Who is that someone?[50]

## Astrology, magic, and medicine

Ficino's aim in *De vita* III is to show doctors and patients how to get life from the heavens. The operative principle for accomplishing this is that "at the right times heavenly things can be attracted to humans through lower things that sympathize with those above." And behind this principle is a "Platonic statement" of theory, that "the structure of the universe is so interconnected that heavenly things exist on earth in an earthly condition and earthly things in turn exist in heaven at a heavenly level."[51] Everywhere up and down the cosmic strata, like attracts like. The source of this Platonic wisdom is a tract on magic by Proclus, the last major Greek thinker in a tradition that Ficino traced back through an "ancient theology" to Zoroaster and Hermes Trismegistus. Proclus taught that natural forces of likeness and sympathy were enough to link heaven and earth magically, but he also said that the same forces enabled "the ancient sages to bring divine powers into the region of mortals."[52]

Ficino, Plato's translator, was the great pioneering Hellenist of his age. He also studied and Latinized works by the ancient Neoplatonists – Proclus, Synesius, Iamblichus, Porphyry, and their master, Plotinus – which had not



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been read in Western Europe for more than a millennium. In these venerable texts he found a view of reality that was appealing to him yet threatening to his Christian faith: that nature and supernature form a continuum. This notion was the paradoxical product of a philosophy so awed by God's transcendence that it produced thousands of pages of theology while striving not to speak of Divinity itself, the ineffable One. All space, both physical and metaphysical, between the One on high and Earth far below is full of lesser gods, who are always already there in the world of nature. The magician cannot conjure or command them, strictly speaking, and has no need to try. He need only find or rearrange the natural things, places, and times where the gods will act and sometimes show themselves.[53]

By manipulating natural objects, the magus discovers the divine but does not cause it, strictly speaking. Nonetheless, from a Christian point of view, any magic that claims to "bring divine powers into the region of mortals," in the looser language used by Proclus, will break the first commandment. Better than any of his readers who lacked access to the Neoplatonic philosophers, Ficino understood the problem: that "supercelestial things can be made to favor us or perhaps even enter us."[54] The continuum of divinity rises from terrestrial through celestial to even higher entities that might be identified either abstractly, as Forms and Ideas, or concretely, as mythic personalities. But the genial Jupiter and the angry Mars, gods of ancient Greece and Rome, had become demons in the new Christian religion. The holy images in their temples had turned into idols. Gems bearing such images might also be idols, as Ficino feared.[55]

Ficino's predicament was that the same respected authorities who taught him physics, physiology and clinical practice had approved astrological images.[56] His response to this perplexity in *De vita* III makes it a characteristically Renaissance text. Vexed by a Christian's dilemma, he turns for answers to an ancient Greek – to Plotinus – and then he interprets Plotinus as imitating another sage whom he thought to be much older, Hermes Trismegistus.[57]

Ficino is thinking of an analogy between statues in particular and material things in general that Plotinus used to explain how magic operates. Although the divine is everywhere, its presence will work best for mortals who prepare appropriate receptacles (statues, for example), which are like mirrors reflecting divine images. *Every physical thing*, in fact, is an image in matter of a lower form which in turn mirrors a higher form, making all natural objects ingredients for the magician, who puts them together to receive divine gifts from above. Since the *Asclepius*, a text ascribed to Hermes Trismegistus, had briefly described statue-making of this kind in ancient Egypt, Ficino concludes that Plotinus took his magic from the Egyptian Hermes.[58]



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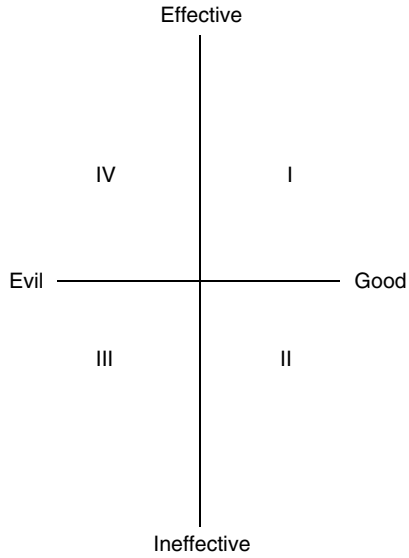


Figure 8.3: Evaluating magic

Even before *De vita* III appeared in print, Ficino had to defend his magic, using the old distinction between the natural and the demonic. "Wicked magic is based on worshipping demons," he maintains, while "natural magic gets help from the heavens for the body's good health." He categorically rejects demonic magic and attributes it to Satan. But there is also a nondemonic magic that only "brings natural materials under natural causes at the right moment to form them in a wondrous way." Another distinction between kinds of nondemonic magic then follows. "There are two types of this art," says Ficino; "one goes to extremes, but the other is of great importance. The former concocts useless marvels for show ... and we must flee far from it since it is worthless and harmful to health. But we must hold on to the important type that links medicine with astrology."[59]

Ficino's magic can go right or wrong along two axes (Fig. 8.3): one between *good* and *evil*, the other between the *effective* and the *ineffective*; the first belongs to moral philosophy, the other to natural philosophy. Magic will be both effective and good (I), for example, if it uses an earthly object (myrobalan) to get power from the right heavenly object (Jupiter, the planet) in order to invigorate the elderly. Using the same earthly object for the same purpose to get power from the wrong heavenly object (Venus) will still be good, but not effective (II). Suppose we use a different object (a talisman) not to tap a planet's power spontaneously but to communicate with a person (Jupiter, the planetary demon), and suppose the person ignores us? Our magic



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will be ineffective but still evil (III) because trying to deal with demons is sinful. Worst of all is evil magic that works (IV): using a heavenly object (Jupiter again) to make prayer more powerful with the unintended result of inviting a different demon to attack.[60] This simplified system of two axes omits other oppositions (natural/artificial, genuine/false, serious/frivolous, transitive/intransitive) that would extend the graph into more dimensions.

Thus, in this simpler scheme, natural magic can be good (e.g. for healing) or evil (e.g. for harming), as well as effective or ineffective, depending on intentions and results. All demonic magic is evil, however, whatever its effect or intent. But both natural and demonic magic can be fraudulent or frivolous, falsely claiming to produce true wonders or producing them for trivial purposes. Finally, both natural and demonic magic can use artifice: setting a gem in gold, for example, or carving words on the gem. Ficino's reasons for thinking that some natural magic is good, sincere, serious, and effective were of three kinds: *historical*, *empirical*, and *theoretical*.

*Mytho-historical* might be a better label than *historical* for reasons of the first type, which refer not only to real persons like Plotinus but also to mythic figures like Hermes Trismegistus. As an architect of a culture that revered the past, Ficino would naturally honor the authority of Aristotle, Albumasar, Aquinas, and other sages, but he also amplified the power of history with a special historiography – the ancient theology – which he discovered in the Church Fathers and revived for Renaissance Europe. Just as Moses first received the divine wisdom revealed to the prophets, apostles, and evangelists of sacred scripture, so Zoroaster and Hermes inaugurated a tradition of pagan wisdom that culminated in Plato and continued with Plotinus, Proclus, and the other Neoplatonists.[61]

No one could appreciate better than Ficino the place of Hermes in this lineage, especially on the topic of magic. One of his earliest works was the *Pimander*, the first Latin version of fourteen Greek treatises of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, which was unknown in the medieval West. Ficino cites this material nowhere in the *Three Books on Life*, probably because it deals with theology and spirituality, not magic. In fact, *De vita* gives serious, though small, attention only to the Latin *Asclepius*, a Hermetic writing that Ficino did not need to translate; outside the single chapter that condemns the *Asclepius* for demonolatry, he mentions Hermes as an author of Hermetic texts only four times in passing.[62] Moreover, Ficino's brief remarks comparing Egypt's cult statues with the magical images of Plotinus are not kind to Hermes. If the famous statues actually moved and spoke, it was not astral power but demonic deceit that animated them. When Egyptian priests lured demons into statues, their motive was to trick people into honoring false gods. Oracles delivered through the statues were fraudulent. The just verdict of Iamblichus was to "condemn the Egyptians because they not only accepted



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demons as steps to be followed toward the gods above but also very often adored them."[63]

Introducing the book that closes with this indecisive chapter on Plotinus and Hermes, Ficino had announced that "the ancient philosophers, having examined the powers of things celestial and those below with the utmost care, ... rightly seem to have turned their whole inquiry toward getting life for themselves from the heavens." He then lists Pythagoras, Democritus, and Apollonius of Tyana – but not Hermes – among "those who were the most devoted students of this topic," and the omission is unsurprising. Ficino's magical philosophizing might be called many things, but surely not Hermetic. Hermes helped him find a pedigree for magic, but gave no philosophical account of it.[64]

*Empirical* evidence for thinking magic good and effective might seem scarcer than historical authority, but it is plentiful in the *Three Books on Life*. Magic can be good when it is useful, and evidence of such utility is copious in Ficino's medical lore. His prior moral argument is that a decision not to abandon the body for the care of the soul alone – a real option for Christians of his day – entails caring for the body's health, which is the task of medicine and medical magic.[65] To learn these arts, to compile the hundreds of concrete and detailed recipes in his book, Ficino consulted ancient and medieval authorities, but he also learned personally from contemporaries and from his own experience. In fact, personal effort and experience are a conspicuous theme of *De vita* III, where it underwrites the problematic use of images.[66]

Everyone knows that hellebore is a purge, says Ficino. The plant's manifest power along with its occult property enables it to rejuvenate spirit, body, and mind. Myrobalans also preserve youth in this way. And astrologers think that images on stones do the same.[67] Are they right? Rhazes says that the egg-like eagle-stone amulet – perhaps a small geode, undecorated (Fig. 8.4) – speeds childbirth. By claiming personal experience of the stone's effect, Rhazes encourages his readers to consult their own clinical experience.[68] Having read authorities like Rhazes who themselves relied on personal experience and effort, Ficino will then collect his own clinical data. "*My* experience," he writes, "is that medicine hardly acts at all when the Moon is in conjunction with Venus," and "*we* have found that night air is unfriendly to the spirits."[69]

Taking up the harder topic of images, Ficino remembers that he had a plan to test them. He wanted to carve the constellation Ursa into a piece of magnetite and hang it around his neck with iron thread when the Moon's position was favorable. He found that the Bear was governed by Mars and Saturn, however, and he had read that evil demons inhabit its northern skies, so he seems not to have actually tried this test. But he witnessed a trial of a different image. The Indian dragon-stone that he describes, "marked with



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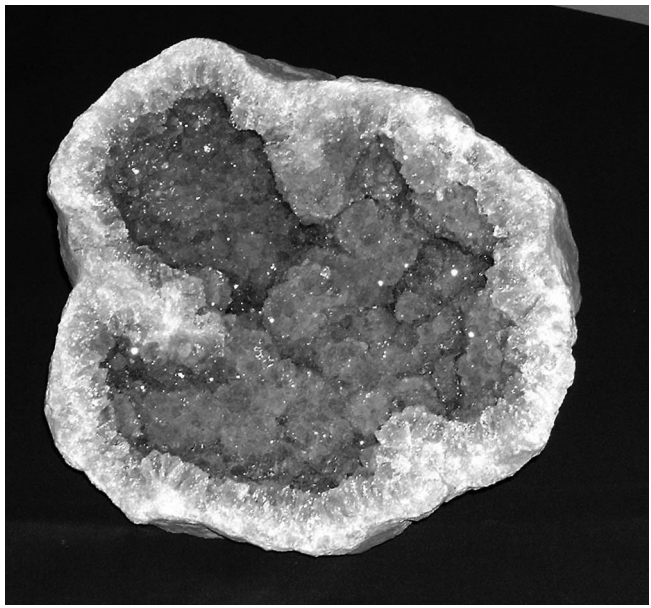

Figure 8.4: Geode

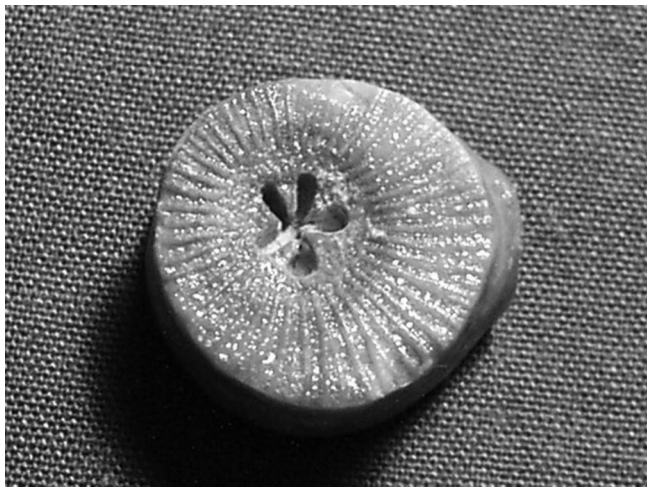

Figure 8.5: Crinoid stem

many little starlike dots in a row," was probably a calcified marine fossil – a crinoid stem (Fig. 8.5). Soaked with strong vinegar, the apparently lifeless stone bubbled and moved about, giving a striking demonstration of power.

In the stone's markings and motions, Ficino saw the tracks of Draco, a celestial source for the object's liveliness. The dragon-stone fascinated him



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because the image on it was natural and thus perhaps exempt from worries about talismans.[70] But he also described another more dubious image of a lion "in gold, using his feet to roll a stone in the shape of the sun" (Fig. 8.6). This image vaguely resembles the talismans of the *Picatrix*, a Latinized manual of Arab astrology so notorious that Ficino used it without naming it. This solar and leonine talisman, made when Leo is ascendant, was a cure for kidney disease, "approved by Pietro d'Abano and confirmed by experience." The experience claimed here was Pietro's and thus long past. But Ficino had also heard about the lion talisman from Mengo Bianchelli da Faenza, a physician of his circle who used it to cure Giovanni Marliani, a more famous physician.[71] Ficino had plenty of empirical evidence – personal and vicarious, past and present, physical and textual – for the usefulness of astrological images.

The original arguments of *De vita* III for talismans and other magical cures are *theoretical*, however, rather than empirical or historical. The theories in play overlap the medical content of *De vita* I and II, but the distinctive theory in *De vita* III is cosmological, physical, metaphysical, linguistic, and moral, and the aim that motivates much of it is to exclude action at a distance. Ficino's universe is Aristotelian and Ptolemaic, the familiar geocentric cosmos of concentric spheres (Fig. 8.7). All physical action in this universe requires sustained contact, turning common cases, like the flight of a projectile, into puzzles, and making uncommon phenomena like magnetism still more enigmatic. Since stars and planets are a long way off, how can they act on earthly objects like amulets and talismans?

"I don't quite see," Ficino asserts, "that images have *any* effect on a distant object, though I suspect they have some effect on those who wear them."[72] But things were not so simple. First, every physician knew that lepers and plague victims infect others not just by physical contact but also by proximity: carriers of these diseases spread them just by looking at healthy people.[73] Moreover, the great Plotinus, as Ficino knew, had been threatened by a more remote transmission of magical force – star-casting. When a jealous competitor tried to aim a star at Plotinus, focusing its rays like light from a concave mirror, the philosopher bounced the astral power back at his attacker, causing convulsions and wasting. The harm seemed real enough, like the toxic effects of the basilisk or the evil eye, which act at a distance.[74] Ficino might just have labeled such effects *magical* without trying to explain their causes, treating the phenomena as outside nature, uncovered by the prohibition of action at a distance and other physical laws. But to make his magic nondemonic, Ficino wanted to keep it within natural limits. He therefore turned to the microcosm/macrocosm analogy, maintaining that the whole World has a Soul just as every animal has a soul. Natural objects in the world – rocks, plants, beasts, people, and stars – are distant *from one*



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Figure 8.6: Lion demon



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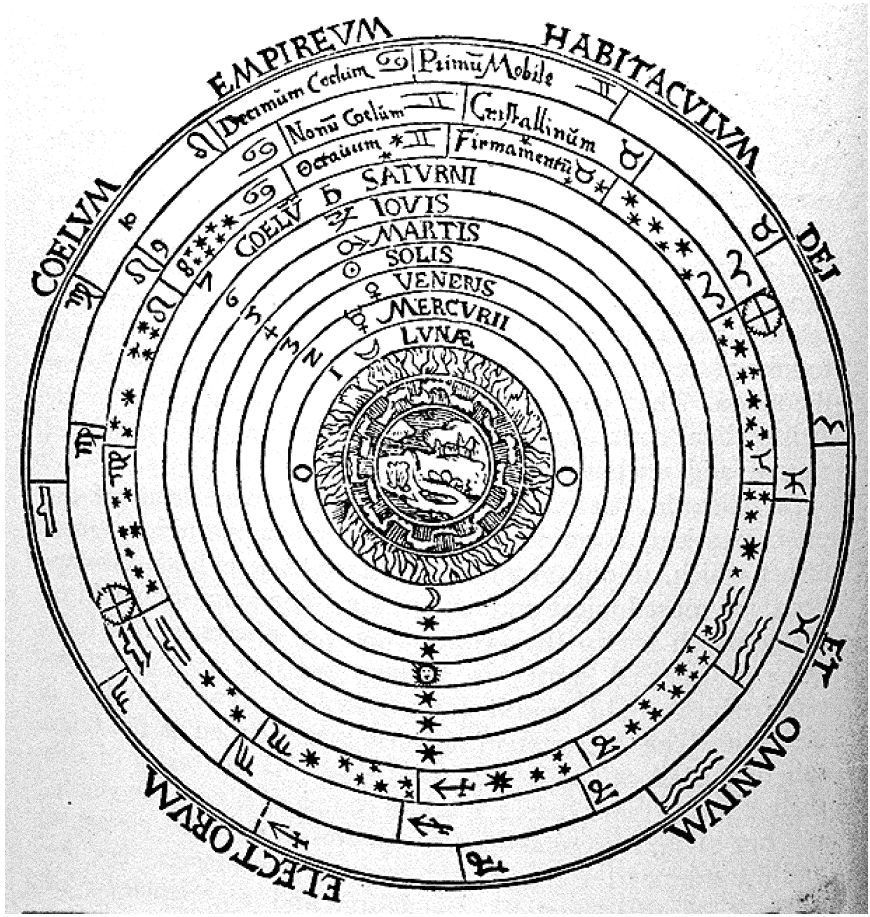


Figure 8.7: Concentric spheres

*another*, but the World Soul is not distant *from them*. It animates them all and unites them, opening channels for magical action.[75]

Ficino's Cosmos has a Mind and a Body and a Soul to connect them. In cosmological terms, the Soul is the *primum mobile*, the animate sphere that surrounds and moves the sphere of the fixed stars and the seven lower planetary spheres (see Fig. 8.7). Corresponding to each *Idea* in the world's Mind is a *form* in its Soul. These forms are called *seminal reasons* because they are the seeds from which *species* grow, so that each species in the material world, which is the Body of the cosmos, corresponds to a seminal reason in its Soul. Every *individual* natural object is a member of a species. Take an object of one species and connect it with other individuals of different species: if all the species involved are connected with the same Idea, this



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is a metaphysical recipe for magic, for drawing power down from that supercelestial Idea.[76]

The World Soul made the *figures* that we see in the heavens; figures are patterns of stars and planets joined by rays of light and force emitted by heavenly bodies. Stored in these celestial structures are all lower species. The metaphysics of Ideas and forms, made visible in these configurations, shows how the Soul uses seminal reasons to make the *specific forms* embodied in physical objects.[77] Talismans and magic statues, just because they are objects in a cosmos of such objects, connect with these circuits of power. But Christians had to avoid statue magic because statues that move and speak are idols and receptacles for demons. Alert to this danger, Ficino countered with the view of Plotinus

> that everything can be done with the help of the World Soul in that it produces and activates forms of natural objects through certain seminal reasons divinely implanted in it . . . [and] never abandoned by the Ideas of the supreme Mind . . . Through these reasons Soul can easily affect the material objects to which it gave form in the beginning through those same reasons if, at the right moment, a magician or priest applies forms of things, having correctly assembled them – forms that are each related to one reason or another.[78]

As a physician, Ficino knew that drugs acquire new forms when heated by the heavens through rays from stars and planets. As a scholar, he discovered the Neoplatonic metaphysics that gave new depth to this traditional medicine and that might also exculpate his magic.[79]

Accordingly, Ficino urged his fellow physicians to "do careful research on which of the metals fits best in an order of some star and which stone is highest in this order . . . so that you can borrow the heavenly things which are in sympathy with such a receptacle." Without much explanation, he is talking about a *taxis* or *series*, another Neoplatonic construct. To close the gap between the bodiless One and the embodied many, the later Neoplatonists filled it with intermediates in graded chains that rise from matter to the immaterial and transmit power from above to below. Ficino describes the bottom end of one such series, a solar *taxis*, where "the cock or hawk has the highest place among animals, balsam or laurel among plants, gold among metals, and carbuncle or pantaurus among stones."[80] Because this series is solar, power flows to the lowest objects in it from solar Ideas on high, down through solar forms, seminal reasons and the Sun to earthly forms or species embodied as physical things. At its upper end, a *taxis* is disembodied, headed by immaterial forms that Proclus called monads and henads. These metaphysical chains bind the cosmos together, and spirit does the same, reinforced by celestial *rays* and *figures*. Spirit, rays, and figures all



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provide physical and cosmological solutions to the problem of action at a distance.

Since the World's Body lives, moves and generates other bodies, it obviously has a Soul and also spirit to connect Soul with Body. This cosmic spirit is "a better body, a non-body, as it were," through which the World Soul makes all natural things live and breed. But gems and metals fail to generate other gems and metals: dense matter occludes the productive spirit in them. Yet when alchemists liberate that spirit by sublimation, art causes base metals to produce gold, releasing the latent power of the earthly spirit that differs from the cosmic kind – the quintessence – only in deriving from the four elements. Still, little of the spirit in earthbound humans is earth, more is water, much is air, and most is fire, making it akin to the celestial fifth element. Like the cosmic spirit, ours is "a very thin body, as if somehow not body when it is soul, and likewise somehow not soul when it is body." This peculiar substance pervades the universe, making it coherent by connecting the separate objects in it. We can use it "to acquire the occult forces of the stars."[81]

Bound together physically and metaphysically, the parts of the world constitute "a living thing more unified than any other," a cosmic organism. Since the limbs and organs of any animal affect one another, the influence of every part of this perfect organism on all other parts will be even stronger, helping the world's Body to move, live, and breathe. Its breath is the cosmic spirit which, when applied to our spirit, connects us with the animate heavens. By opening these magical channels and acting as part of the universal organism, humans get life and power from above.[82]

Heaven is far away, however, and "does not touch earth . . . [except] by the rays of the stars, which are like its eyes."[83] Just as earthly fire warms, penetrates and changes other natural things, these much stronger rays penetrate the whole mass of the earth to form gems and metals deep inside it. Since talismans are made of the same gems and metals, the rays that first formed these minerals will penetrate talismans instantly. Their hardness is no obstacle, much less the softer material of the human body and spirit. In fact, stones and metals are excellent receptacles (like magical capacitors) for rays because their hard matter insulates and stores the occult powers that rays transmit.[84]

Rays are also organic and alive. When Ficino says that they come from the eyes of the world's Body, he is thinking not only of animal and human figures in the zodiac but also, by analogy, of earthly creatures like the basilisk as well as people who project harm from their evil eyes.[85] Alkindi had taught that rays run in both directions between any two (or more) objects – between the basilisk and its victim, reciprocally, but also between a planet, the stars in a constellation, and an astrologer gazing at the heavens. Planets are said to be in various *aspects* (trine, quartile, sextile), meaning degrees of circular



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distance from one another, but an *aspectus* is also a "looking at." Just as we look at the planets and stars, those mighty living beings also look at each other and at us: "with the rays of their eyes, the heavenly bodies instantly work wonders on our bodies by gazing at them and making contact."[86]

Rays streaming from stars and planets make up figures.[87] Some, like the zodiacal constellations, are visible to anyone who sees the night sky, but others are the arcana of astrology and less conspicuous. To the untutored eye it will not be obvious, for example, just when "the Moon is located under the watery signs, Cancer, Pisces and Scorpio, with the rays of Jupiter shining upon it," a collocation that Ficino describes as good for a patient who needs purging.[88] These two planets and three constellations make a celestial figure, whose analog can be made on Earth by carving a stone with images of Jupiter and the Moon, a crab, two fish, and a scorpion, producing a watery talisman. If the stone is a watery mineral (aquamarine, perhaps) set in gold (a jovial metal), the talisman will be stronger because "the elemental power in its matter matches the specific power naturally innate in it, and then this matches the other specific power taken from the heavens through a figure."[89] Assuming that the matter of the talisman conforms to the watery figure in the heavens, that *natural* celestial figure will augment the power of the *artificial* figure carved in the stone, which should be done when the heavenly figure rules the sky. The effect will be like music produced by one lyre resonating with another lyre but not touching it.[90]

This ancient musical analogy is crucial to Ficino's defense of natural magic.[91] Humans make artificial things, like lyres and talismans, but only God made natural objects, like stones, which therefore share in the divine goodness. Moreover, a human artificer can be held responsible for human artifice, but not for God's creation. Hence, to the extent that magic is meant to do good and is done with the natural objects which are God's creatures, the magician will be blameless. To pile up evidence for this argument, Ficino extended his theorizing about spirit, rays, and figures with models and mechanisms for magic that exploit the powers of natural objects. Besides the resonance of lyres in attunement, Ficino also discusses seeds, grafts, baits, kindling, reflection, attraction, impregnation, and fetal development as physical models of magical action.

The resounding lyre is a critical case because lyres, like talismans, are artificial things whose natural components (wood, catgut, metal, stone) are physically effective and, at worst, morally neutral. Thomas Aquinas, to whom Ficino defers in sensitive passages of *De vita* III, therefore confirms "those effects that the heavens ordinarily cause through . . . natural objects." A talisman, however, is more than the sum of its parts. It works only as "a composite already located in some particular species of the artificial," given



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that "constellations provide the order of being and persisting not only for natural things but also for the artificial." By *composite* Thomas means a *natural* object, the combination of a form with matter which is a physical particular, like a gem. But Thomas also says that the image on a gem works "not so much because some figure is in the matter" as because the figured composite has been put – by its figure – in a species of *artificial* things.[92] This is Ficino's account of Thomas's position, which in the *Summa theologiae* actually seems less generous: no celestial power flows to talismans "insofar as they are artificial, but only because of their natural matter."[93]

For both Ficino and Thomas, carving a scorpion on a gem will make the stone a member of the species of artificial scorpions – which includes drawings, paintings, statues, toys, and so on. But for Ficino, a scorpion-gem will also belong to the *taxis* that includes the arachnid on Earth, Scorpio in the sky, and a supercelestial Scorpion among the henads (Fig. 8.8).

Power flows to the gem because a figure plugs it into a metaphysical circuit – a stronger version of what, according to Ficino, Thomas had permitted stars to do for artificial things. But in words that Ficino did not explain, Thomas had also said that "images in artificial objects are like substantial forms," namely, the forms that make a natural composite what it is, a member of a *natural* species. "Nothing precludes ... heavenly influence coming ... from the arrangement of the figure that gives the image its species," Thomas concluded, "not insofar as [the figure] is a figure, but insofar

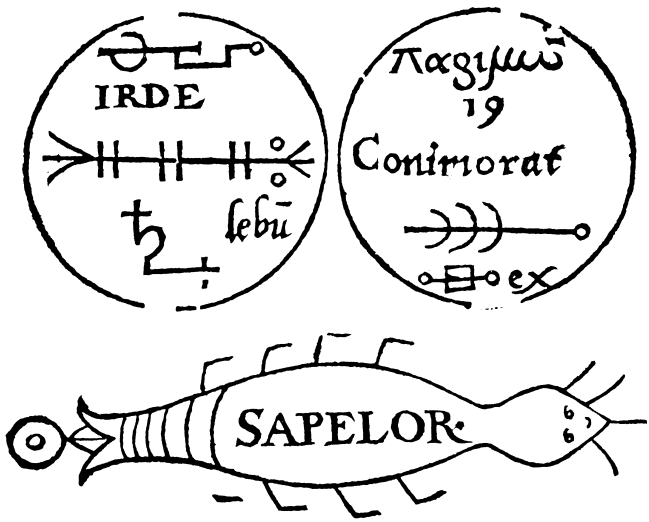


Figure 8.8: Design for a scorpion talisman



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as it causes the species of what is artificially made and gets power from the stars."[94]

Since Ficino cites several texts by Thomas about magic and images, including the one that describes images as quasi-substantial forms and thus quasi-natural, his failure to make more of this attractive argument is puzzling. Thinking it "obvious that even lifeless bodies acquire certain powers and abilities from the heavenly bodies . . . beyond those of the . . . qualities of the elements," Thomas reasoned that if "various stones and plants acquire other occult powers . . . nothing prevents a human from getting an ability from the influence of a heavenly body to do certain physical things – for a physician to heal, for example."[95] Despite the openings given him, perhaps Ficino thought it provocative to enlist the saint so persuasively in so dubious a cause. His own reasoning about images as figures, at any rate, is careful and convoluted, leading to the conclusion that

> figures . . . have a property which is peculiar and inseparable from species inasmuch as they have been fixed by the heavens together with species. In fact, they also have a very strong linkage with Ideas in the . . . Mind of the world. And since these same figures are a type of . . . species . . . they get their own powers there.[96]

The forms, figures and species of physical objects connect them and their users not only with heavenly bodies but also with divine and supercelestial Ideas – an alluring but dangerous prospect. By using physical models to explain the same process, Ficino brings his metaphysical magic down to earth and makes it less threatening.

Comparing astrology with farming, for example, makes stargazing seem practical and credible. Just as the farmer sows seed in a field to make it fertile or puts a graft into a plant to improve its species, so the magus will collect influences from above to insert them into natural objects below and empower them.[97] Females of all kinds, says Ficino, animal, vegetable and mineral, are subjected to the corresponding males for impregnation: when "the magus subjects terrestrial things to celestials" to make them magical, then, it is just like the male magnet making the female iron attractive.[98] Since everything is alive in a world that "desires its parts to be married together," natural attractions – between heavy things and the Earth's center, light things and the Moon, moist things and the roots of plants – are sexual, and magic will emulate the loving Nature which is "everywhere the sorceress."[99] Nature supplies all the materials for magical action, which becomes artificial only when humans intervene to rearrange the natural objects that suffice for doing magic.

Spirit "is a kind of bait or kindling for linking Soul to Body in the cosmos," writes Ficino, "and Soul is also a kind of kindling in the spirit and Body of the world." Spirit is bait for higher powers when nature uses a fetus to draw



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down the spirit which will then attract a soul. Taken from Proclus, the kindling analogy for Soul's activity is more complex. For both Body and spirit, Soul is the force that draws them up to Mind. In detail, the model is dry wood (Body) penetrated by oil (spirit) to sustain the heat and fire (Soul) which is the vehicle of light (Mind): "kindling" is Ficino's term here for the whole apparatus of flaming, oil-soaked wood.[100] A related analogy substitutes sulfur under a flame for the burning oily wood. Vapors from the sulfur rise, like ascending spirit, before they burst into flame from an incendiary cause that works on them from above to below.[101]

In simpler terms, "wherever some type of matter is exposed to the celestials as a glass mirror is to your face or the wall opposite you to your voice, the matter is immediately affected from on high by a very powerful agent."[102] The reflection of an image in a mirror is an intuitive model of an instantaneous effect happening at a distance, like the astral Leo's immediate influence on a leonine drug. But sound reflected from a wall recalls a problem already posed by the model of the resonating lyre. Sounds make music, music can be sung with meaningful words, and meanings can be addressed only to minds, one's own mind or another's. But whose mind is it? Angel or demon?[103]

Discussing "the power of words and song to get help from the heavens," Ficino recommends learning the virtues of heavenly bodies and then "inserting them into the meanings of our words."[104] Clearly, part of his medical magic is astral song containing meaningful speech. To evaluate this music and other magical therapies, he provides a ranking (Fig. 8.9) of various means of healing – material and mental – and the planets associated with them, calling his schema "seven levels where attraction proceeds from higher entities to those below" and putting music in the middle with the Sun.[105]

Stones and metals fall to the bottom of the list with the Moon. Their hardness makes it difficult to get at the power stored inside them, and

| *Levels* | *Means of healing* | *Planets* |
|---|---|---|
| 7 | Intelligence | Saturn |
| 6 | Reason | Jupiter |
| 5 | Imagination | Mars |
| 4 | Sound, music, song | Sun |
| 3 | Powders, vapors, odors | Venus |
| 2 | Plants, animals | Mercury |
| 1 | Stones, metals | Moon |

Figure 8.9: Planetary levels of healing



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moral problems arise if they carry images. Plants, animals, powders, vapors, and odors at levels 2 and 3 are all within the range of conventional medicine and not as impressive as Ficino's magical remedies. His major innovation comes at level 4 with sound, music, and song. Above this level, the higher remedies are no longer material and thus beyond the scope of *De vita* III. Like the lower therapies, the solar cures at level 4 are still material because air, the medium that transmits them, is a kind of matter.[106]

"The very matter of song is much purer and more like the heavens than the matter of medicines," Ficino explains, "for it is hot or warm air, still breathing, in fact." This living matter "even carries meaning like a mind." Moreover, if song is "filled with spirit and meaning . . . and corresponds to one or another of the heavenly bodies, it has no less power than any other composite medicine, projecting power into the singer and then from this person into the listener nearby." In fact, song is just "another spirit": like the evil eye that emits vapors to harm a victim, singing is therefore infectious in the medical sense.[107] Such dangers multiply with every line of Ficino's chapter on astral song, which runs the risk not only of demonolatry but also of negligent magical assault on innocent bystanders.

Hence, although Ficino spends most of his worry in *De vita* III on talismans, the magical singing that bothers him less is actually the greater threat. Words in songs, like those on talismans, are a moral trap because they speak to uninvited and malignant minds. Unlike songs, however, talismans are unlikely transmitters of injury to others. Whatever they receive from above will be insulated by their dense, heavy matter, so different from the light and airy stuff of song, through which harmful forces can easily spread from the singer's spirit to the listener's. "The amazing power in spirit that sings excitedly" will be the more dangerous magic, *physically* for those who hear the song and *morally* for the singer, especially if the singing harmonizes with the music of the spheres.[108]

Although all seven planets have voices, only the Sun, Mercury, Venus, and Jupiter can sing. "When your playing and singing reverberates as theirs does, they are seen to reply right away," according to Ficino, "as naturally as a vibration resounding from a lute or an echo from a wall."[109] But if the singers in the celestial quartet are planetary gods, exchanging musical messages with them will be sinful, especially since Ficino specifies that magical communication runs between souls as well as bodies. To make matters worse, while harmonic forces sent down by heavenly souls sometimes descend indirectly, carried by rays, they also sometimes arrive straight from the celestials, "by a choice of free will."[110] If magic needs a numinous act of will from on high, human will may also be complicit, and magic loses the camouflage of unwilled natural action.



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"I can call spirits from the vasty deep," the wizard brags, and then the cynic asks "But will they come?"[111] Whether spiritual persons actually arrive or not, the magus who summons them, intentionally or unintentionally, is in moral trouble unless the Church has blessed the message – when godparents renounce Satan at baptism, for example, or when a priest exorcizes demons. Nonetheless, Ficino thinks he can avoid the danger of astral singing, or perhaps diminish it, by downgrading planetary gods to demons. The demons who hear Ficino's songs, however, are not the ordinary unclean spirits or fallen angels of Christian demonology, who are always evil. In Greek religion generally, and also for the Neoplatonists, a demon is a mighty being, lower than the gods but still higher than humans and not evil as such. In the hierarchies of Neoplatonic theology, deities and demons come in many grades, and Ficino fixes on those that are low enough not to be "completely separate from matter" while still sharing the vitality of the World Soul. These *cosmic* demons are embodied, unlike the bodiless *hypercosmic* gods, and their bodies are stars and planets.[112]

Ficino's cosmic demons have three key properties: they are not high gods; they are not evil; and their bodies are the heavenly bodies of astrology. Since the Neoplatonists placed many Jupiters, Mercuries, and other Olympians at all levels of their elaborate theology, it was easy for Ficino to take the cue and turn the planetary gods into lesser demons.[113] Having demoted the sky gods, he also sanitized them by exploiting the kinship between the tutelary or personal demon of the Neoplatonists, with all its astrological associations, and the Christian guardian angel. The lord of geniture in every person's horoscope is an avatar of this protective demon. The natural talent (*ingenium*) that a horoscope reveals corresponds to a divinity (*genius*) within. "To every person born," says Ficino, "a particular demon and guardian of life has been allotted by his very own star."[114]

He also mentions that an inferior *aerial* demon of the cosmic type may be present beforehand in the matter of natural objects that the magician uses. If an aerial demon were just an impersonal force, like a magical ray, or a type of matter, like spirit, Ficino might be off the hook, morally and theologically. But the "airy spirit" of *The Tempest*, to cite a familiar example, is no such thing. "Come with a thought, I thank thee, Ariel, come," says Prospero, and Ariel enters: "Thy thoughts I cleave to. What's thy pleasure?"[115]

A demonic mind cleaving to human thoughts and desires is just what Ficino needs to avoid, which is why he wants "a natural force of divinity" built into magical objects. He attributes the notion to Hermes, but this allusion to the Hermetic *Asclepius* occurs in the same passage where "Iamblichus condemns the Egyptians" for demonolatry – the Iamblichus who is actually Ficino's main source for the doctrine of cosmic and hypercosmic demons.[116] From



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Iamblichus two things should have been clear to him: that lower demons and high gods alike are persons with souls and minds, not just inert forces or peculiar kinds of matter; and that the magic of natural objects is always in the service of divine persons.[117] In the end, the labyrinth of Platonic theology gave Ficino no place to hide.

Perhaps for that reason, his philosophical theory of magic is a tour de force of caution and evasion. Although a few confident claims can be found in *De vita* III, hedges and hesitations are numerous.[118] Ficino seldom tells us what *he thinks* about magic in a clear, straightforward way, but the following statement on talismans has the ring of an official, public position:

> I believe it would be safer to trust oneself to medicines than to images, and that the arguments about heavenly power that I gave in favor of images can have force in the case of medicines rather than figures. For if images have power, the likelihood is not so much that they have acquired it recently through a figure as that they possess it naturally through matter treated in this way . . . not so much by coming to have a figure as by the heating that comes from hammering. If the hammering and heating happen harmonically, in consonance with the celestial harmony that once infused power into the matter, it excites that same power and makes it strong . . . So maybe it is just some kind of hammering and heating that draws out power latent in the matter – when the time is right, obviously. Taking advantage of the celestial moment certainly helps in compounding medicines. But if anyone should want to use metals and stones, it is best just to hammer and heat them without making any figure. For apart from my suspicion that figures are worthless, we should not rashly permit even the shadow of idolatry.[119]

Ficino's bottom line is prudential and conventional: "never try anything at all that religion forbids."[120]

Long before he wrote *De vita* III, he knew the risks that such a project would bring. He had drafted a tract against predictive astrology in 1477, before writing his plague book and *De vita* I.[121] As *De vita* III circulated in Florence, he pricked up his ears for the predictable questions. Are medicine and astrology fit callings for a priest? Is astrology not a threat to free will? How can the heavens be alive if pantheism is heresy? Surely the demonolatry implied by magical images of pagan gods is a grave sin against religion.[122] Answering his inquisitors playfully and sarcastically was one way to dodge their complaints. When the attacks grew more pointed, he suggested a more direct approach, a scholar's rhetorical dodge, to his protectors: "tell them that magic or images are not really approved by Marsilio but described while he interprets Plotinus."[123]

Nevertheless, Ficino knew full well that *De vita*, with all its learned philosophizing, was also a compilation of recipes, a medical advice book. If doctors and patients took his advice, he was responsible for the physical or moral harm done to them. This is why, when speaking of a love talisman that



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resembles an image from the disreputable *Picatrix*, he mentions "many minute observations about stars and words which I do not propose to repeat since my topic is medicine, not spells."[124] These words draw an unusually sharp line between medicine and magic, evidence that their author understands the ethical burden of his prescriptions. But Ficino's moral response to magic was not as convincing as his natural philosophy and metaphysics. In its framework of Neoplatonized Aristotelianism, *De vita* succeeds as a philosophical account of magic's *effectiveness* (Fig. 8.3), which may explain why the book stayed in print for more than a hundred and fifty years. The magic went too far, however, always overreaching from the domain of natural objects into the realm of personal spirits. If Ficino's many readers were persuaded that his magic was effective, they ought not to have been convinced that it was also *good* for good Christians.

## NOTES

1. Ficino 1989; quotations from Ficino 1989 follow the Kaske/Clark text, but the translations are mine; for editions and manuscripts, see Kaske's introduction, 6–12. For the topics covered in these notes, the non-English, especially the Italian, bibliography is immense and indispensable, but I have avoided reference to it for reasons of space; see especially the writings of Eugenio Garin, Cesare Vasoli, Paola Zambelli, and Giancarlo Zanier. I am grateful to the editor of this volume and to Michael Allen for their criticisms and comments.
2. For a summary, see Allen 1999. The standard accounts of Ficino's philosophy are Kristeller 1943; Hankins 1990a; and the many books and articles by Allen and Hankins on specific works and themes. Ficino's major work of philosophy, his *Platonic Theology*, can now be read in English in Ficino 2001–6. On the philosophy of the period, see Copenhaver and Schmitt 1992.
3. Porphyry, *De vita Plotini* 1.
4. Siraisi 1990, 21–6, 48–77; Grendler 2002, 3–40, 77–82, 314–28.
5. Park 1985, 54–65, 199–209; Grendler 2002, 77–82.
6. Ficino 1989, 190; Dioscorides, 1.109; Pliny, *Natural History* 12.100, 13.18; for "myrobalans" see the *Encylopedia Britannica*; for the ship-stopper, the basilisk, and related items, see Copenhaver 1991.
7. Ficino 1989, 136–40, 144, 148–50, 154, 158, 178, 184, 190–4, 202, 214, 218, 228–30, 246, 294, 300–2, 350.
8. Ficino 1989, 106, 508–10; Kaske's introduction, 7, 17–21.
9. Above, n. 7.
10. Ficino 1989, 110; I almost always use the words "spirit" and "spirits" to translate Ficino's *spiritus*, which almost always corresponds to the Greek *pneuma*. It is important not to confuse this odd material substance with the unusual immaterial persons called "spirits" in English. The most important treatment of Ficino's *spiritus* is Walker 1958, 3–59, 75–84; on the larger issues of astrology and magic, see also Thorndike 1923–58; Yates 1964, 62–83; Garin 1983, 29–112; Copenhaver 1988a; Copenhaver 2006.
11. Ficino 1989, 108.



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12. Siraisi 1990, 21.
13. Ibid., 101–4.
14. Ibid., 104–6.
15. Ficino 1989, 112.
16. Ibid., 112–14; classic studies of melancholy are Burton 1972; and Klibansky, Panofsky, and Saxl 1964; for more recent accounts of astrology, see Barton 1994; Grafton 1999, 1–70; Grafton and Newman 2001.
17. Ficino 1989, 116–20.
18. Ibid., 118–22.
19. Ibid., 130, 134–6, 146, 150–2, 160–2; Siraisi 1990, 121–2, 136–41.
20. Ficino 1989, 122–8, 138.
21. Ibid., 128–38.
22. Ibid., 138–40; Siraisi 1990, 141–52.
23. Ficino 1989, 140–8, 156–60.
24. Ibid., 148.
25. Rhazes 1544, 524; Siraisi 1990, 123, 209.
26. Smoller 1994, 76, 179, n. 103; Siraisi 1990, 128.
27. Ficino 1481; Kaske's introduction to Ficino 1989, 25.
28. Siraisi 1990, 128–30, 133–6.
29. Ficino 1989, 102, 106; Connell 1999; Park 1985, 4–5.
30. Kaske's introduction to Ficino 1989, 6–8, 24–31.
31. Ficino 1989, 184, 228, 312, 326.
32. Ibid., 188, 196–8.
33. Ibid., 192.
34. Ibid., 174–8, 226.
35. Ficino names about seventy distinct authorities – ancient, medieval, and a few contemporaries; see the list in Kaske's second index in Ficino 1989, 485–92; Siraisi 1990, 68–9, 123–36.
36. Ficino 1989, 216.
37. Ibid., 212.
38. Ibid., 208–10.
39. Ibid., 208–12.
40. Aristotle, *De anima* 423b17–26; Ephesians 6:11–12, which became "the world, the flesh and the devil" in the litany of the Anglican prayer book.
41. Ficino 1989, 222–4; Walker 1958, 6–7.
42. Ficino 1989, 220–2.
43. Ibid., 206; below, n. 84.
44. Ibid., 194, 228–30.
45. Ibid., 194.
46. Ibid., 232.
47. These definitions of "stone," "amulet," and "talisman" are mine by stipulation, not normal lexical items; cf. Walker 1958, 14–15.
48. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* 2.23.36, 29.45.
49. For the philosophy that supported Ficino's preference, see Copenhaver 1984; Copenhaver 1986; Copenhaver 1987; Copenhaver 1988a; Copenhaver 1988b; Copenhaver 2006.
50. Ficino 1989, 224: my account of messages, song and music derives from Walker 1958, 5–24, 42–4, 48–53, 75–84; Tomlinson 1993, 101–44, presents an



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important challenge to Walker's view and mine. The answer to Tomlinson's argument is that Ficino cites the chapter from Aquinas (*Summa contra gentiles* 3.105.2–6; below, n. 94) which shows that the magician's words are invitations to demons just because they are signs that can only be addressed to a mind: "Magicians in their works use various vocal sounds that are meaningful and produce certain effects. But insofar as vocal sound is meaningful, it has no power except from some mind, either the mind of the one speaking or the mind of the one to whom it is spoken . . . But it cannot be said that . . . the effect is *from* the mind of the one speaking . . . What is left, then, is that actions of this sort are accomplished through some mind *to which* the speech of the one speaking the vocal sounds . . . is directed. A sign of this is that the meaningful vocal sounds used by magicians are appeals, entreaties, promises or even commands, as of one person addressing another."

51. Ficino 1989, 318.
52. The treatise by Proclus, translated by Ficino as *De sacrificio*, appears with the Greek text and an English translation in Copenhaver 1988b, 102–10; Walker 1958, 36–7; Siorvanes 1996, 51–6. On the ancient theology, see Allen 1998, 24–49; Walker 1972, 1–21; Copenhaver 1993, 149–82; Yates 1964, 1–43.
53. Wallis 1972, 110–34; Copenhaver 1987, 452–5.
54. Ficino 1989, 318; Proclus, *De sacrificio*, above, n. 52.
55. Clark 1997 examines demonology from the point of view of witchcraft, mainly after Ficino's time; for gods, idols and demons in earlier times, see Flint 1991, 3–35, 204–16; Kieckheffer 1990, 8–28, 102–5; Siorvanes 1996, 264–71.
56. Ficino 1989, 278, 320.
57. Ibid., 232, 236–8, 242, 384, 388.
58. Plotinus, *Enneads* 4.3.11; *Asclepius*, 23–4, 37–8, in Hermes Trismegistus (pseudo) 1992, xxxviii, 62, 80–1, 89–90, 208, 236–41, 254–7; below, n. 62.
59. Ficino 1989, 396–8.
60. Ibid., 208–10, 281, 300, 399.
61. Above, n. 52.
62. Ficino 1989, 134, 276, 306, 312; one of these references is to the material on statues from the *Asclepius* mentioned above, n. 58; only one of the others might come from the *Corpus Hermeticum*; the other two cite "technical" medieval Hermetica, which are catalogs of astrological, alchemical, and other recipes, not the "theoretical" Hermetica for which Ficino admired Hermes; Hermes Trismegistus (pseudo) 1992, xxxii-xlv; cf. Walker 1958, 40–1, 45; Yates 1964, 20–61.
63. Ficino 1989, 388; Walker 1958, 42.
64. Ficino 1989, 236; Frances Yates made an eloquent case for Ficino's magic as Hermetic in Yates 1964, 1–83, provoking a torrent of reaction that continues to this day: see Hermes Trismegistus (pseudo) 1992, xlv–lxi; Copenhaver 1988b; Copenhaver 1993; Copenhaver 1990; Copenhaver 1994; Allen 1995, article XII.
65. Ficino 1989, 382.
66. Ibid., 374; below, nn. 67–70.
67. Ibid., 348–50.
68. Ibid., 300; Pliny, *Natural History* 10.12–13; 30.131; 36.149–51.
69. Ficino 1989, 268, 290, 356.
70. Ibid., 316; Copenhaver 1988b, 88–90.



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71. Ficino 1989, 336, and Kaske's notes, 448–9, citing *Picatrix*, Anon. 1986, 82–3 (2.12.39, 44). Leonine demons appear frequently as amulets, but the illustration shown here is from the *Corpus inscriptionum et monumentorum religionis mithriacae* 1956–60, 543; Ulansey 1989, 46–54, explains that in its original context the sphere under the lion's feet is cosmic rather than solar, showing the intersection of the ecliptic with the celestial equator.
72. Ficino 1989, 350.
73. Ibid., 376.
74. Ibid., 324, 340, 350; Porphyry, *De vita Plotini* 10; Allen 1995, article XIV; Copenhaver 1991.
75. Ficino 1989, 244.
76. Ibid., 242.
77. Ibid., 244–6.
78. Ibid., 390.
79. Ibid., 318.
80. Ibid., 308; Proclus, *De sacrificio*, in Copenhaver 1988b; ibid., 85–6; Proclus 1963, 39, 71–2, 79, 140–5, 189, with notes by E. R. Dodds at 208–9, 222–3, 263, 267, 344–5; Iamblichus, *De mysteriis*, 2.11, 5.7, 12, 23; Dodds 1968, 287, 291–5; Siorvanes 1996, 167–89; above, n. 53.
81. Ficino 1989, 254–6, 362–4, 376.
82. Ibid., 250, 254–8.
83. Ibid., 318, 400.
84. Ibid., 320–2, 368; above, n. 43.
85. Ibid., 322–4; Copenhaver 1991.
86. Ibid., 324, 354; Alkindi 1975; Barton 1994, 98–102.
87. Ficino 1989, 244.
88. Ibid., 270–2.
89. Ibid., 328.
90. Ibid., 330–2.
91. Ibid., 356–62; Plato, *Phaedo* 85E–86D; Arist. *De anima* 407b27–32; Plotinus, *Enneads* 4.4.41; below, n. 105.
92. Ficino 1989, 340.
93. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* II–II.96.2 ad 2; Copenhaver 1984, 531–46.
94. Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* III.105.12; above, nn. 77–9.
95. Ficino 1989, 280; Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* III.92.8; for other passages, see *Life*, 340, 382, 390; Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* III.92, 99, 104–5; *Summa theologiae* I.65.4, 91.2, 110.1, 115.3; *De occultis operibus naturae*, 9–11, 14, 17–20; [*De fato*] 5; Walker 1958, 42–4; and above, nn. 93–4.
96. Ficino 1989, 318, 328–30.
97. Ibid., 386.
98. Ibid.
99. Ibid., 384–6; Plotinus, *Enneads* 4.4.40, 43–4; Copenhaver 1988b, 86–8.
100. Ibid., 384; Proclus, *De sacrificio*, in Copenhaver 1988b.
101. Ibid., 386.
102. Ibid., 388.
103. Above, nn. 50 and 90–1.
104. Ficino 1989, 354–8; Walker 1958, 17; above, n. 50.
105. Ficino 1989, 354–6; Walker 1958, 15.



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106. Ficino 1989, 354–6.
107. Ibid., 358–60.
108. Ibid., 360; above, n. 50.
109. Ibid., 360; Walker 1958, 17–18; above, nn. 90–1.
110. Ibid., 364, 368.
111. Shakespeare, *Henry IV*, *Part 1*, III.i.53–5.
112. Ficino 1989, 244, 388; Iamblichus, *De mysteriis*, 57.4–58.8; 271.10–12; Shaw 1995, 89, 133–42, 150–61; cf. Walker 1958, 45–53.
113. Michael Allen has illuminated many cases of Ficino's philosophical uses of the elaborate Neoplatonic theologies, but see especially Allen 1981 and 1984; also Lamberton 1986; Brisson 2004.
114. Ficino 1989, 370; Iamblichus, *De mysteriis*, 278.15–284.10.
115. Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, IV.i.164–5.
116. Ficino 1989, 388; Iamblichus, *De mysteriis*, 32.8–33.11.
117. Copenhaver 1987.
118. Ficino 1989, 248, 276–80, 354, 362–8.
119. Ibid., 342; Walker 1958, 53.
120. Ibid., 280.
121. Allen 1999, 354.
122. Ficino 1989, 380, 394.
123. Ibid., 396.
124. Ibid., 354; Walker 1958, 25, 30.



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# 9

DERMOT MORAN

# Nicholas of Cusa and modern philosophy

## "Gatekeeper of the modern age"

Nicholas of Cusa (Niklas Krebs, known as Cusanus, 1401–64), one of the most original and creative intellects of the fifteenth century,[1] has been variously described as "the last great philosopher of the dying Middle Ages" (Alexandre Koyré), as a "transition-thinker" between the medieval and modern worlds (Frederick Copleston),[2] and as the "gatekeeper of the modern age" (Rudolf Haubst).[3] He is a lone figure with no real successor although he had some influence on Copernicus, Kepler, Bruno, and, tangentially, on Descartes. The German Idealists showed some interest in Nicholas of Cusa but the real revival of his thought was stimulated by the neo-Kantian philosopher Ernst Cassirer (1874–1945), who called him "the first modern thinker" and by the existentialist Karl Jaspers.[4] Cassirer compared him to Kant for his view that objects have to be understood in terms of the categories of our own thought.[5] Other scholars, notably Alexandre Koyré,[6] Hans-Georg Gadamer,[7] Hans Blumenberg,[8] Werner Beierwaltes,[9] and Karsten Harries,[10] all see him in a certain way as a harbinger of modernity.[11] Yet his outlook is essentially conservative, aiming, as Hans Blumenberg has recognized, to maintain the medieval synthesis.[12]

Cusanus was a humanist scholar, Church reformer – his *De concordantia catholica* (*On Catholic Concord*, 1434) included proposals for the reform of Church and state – papal diplomat, and Catholic cardinal. In the course of his life he attempted to reconcile papal and conciliar ecclesiology, Greek Eastern and Latin Western Christianity, Muslims and Christians, traditional theology and emerging mathematical science. In many ways he is a Renaissance figure. An exact contemporary of Gutenberg, he is credited with helping to introduce printing into Italy.[13] He wrote an informed treatise, *De correctione calendarii*, on the reform of the calendar. His astronomical instruments are still preserved in the library at Cues. He has earned a place in the history of mathematics for his attempts to "square the circle." His



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*De docta ignorantia* (*On Learned Ignorance*, 1440) already offers criticisms of the Ptolemaic universe, and postulates that the Earth is in movement and that the universe has no fixed centre.[14] With this account, the twentieth-century physicist Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker even sees Cusanus as bypassing the Copernican world toward the universe of relativity.[15]

As a philosopher and theologian, Cusanus is preoccupied by a single problem that runs through all his works: how can we, as finite created beings, think about the infinite and transcendent God? God is "infinite oneness" (*unitas infinita*, *DDI* 1.5.14). Cusanus begins from what he takes to be the "self-evident" proposition that there is no proportion between finite and infinite (*DDI* 1.3.9). Our rational knowledge progresses by degrees and can get infinitely more precise without coinciding exactly with its object. It must be supplemented by a kind of intellectual unknowing, a knowing that recognizes its own limitations in the sphere of the transcendent and infinite. The arrogant kind of knowing used in disputation must be contrasted with "learned ignorance."

Cusanus himself situates his thought within Platonism both pagan (Plato, Proclus) and Christian (Augustine, Dionysius the Areopagite (pseudo), Scotus Eriugena, Thierry of Chartres). He had the greatest knowledge of the Platonic tradition of anyone prior to Ficino. An eager collector of manuscripts, he eventually owned some 300 of them, including Latin translations of Plato's *Phaedo*, *Crito*, *Apology* and *Seventh Letter*, *Republic*, *Laws*, *Phaedrus*, and *Parmenides*.[16] He owned Moerbeke's translation of Proclus' *Elements of Theology* and *Commentary on the Parmenides* and Petrus Balbus's translation of Proclus' *Platonic Theology*. He had copies of part of Eriugena's *Periphyseon*, Hugh of St. Victor's *Didascalikon*, and several works by Eckhart.

He is most strongly influenced by "our" Dionysius the Areopagite (*De beryllo* or *On the Prism* 12),[17] "disciple of the Apostle Paul" (*De beryllo* 11), "that greatest seeker of divine things" (*maximus ille divinorum scrutator*, *DDI* 1.16.43), "who assigned God many names" (*De beryllo* 46). From his earliest to his last works (e.g. *De li non aliud*) Cusanus cites Dionysius, although he later said that at the time of writing *De docta ignorantia* (1440), he had not yet read Dionysius (*Apologia doctae ignorantiae* 12).[18] He characterizes his Platonism as stemming from the Areopagite, but he also draws on Dionysius' Latin translators and commentators, including Eriugena ("Johannes Scotigena"),[19] Albertus Magnus' *Commentary on the Divine Names*,[20] Robert Grosseteste (whose translations of Dionysius' *Mystical Theology* and *Celestial Hierarchy* he owned in manuscript), Thomas Gallus, and Meister Eckhart.

Cusanus situates Dionysius as a practitioner of dialectic in the tradition stemming from Plato's *Parmenides*. He even anticipates Lorenzo Valla's



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unmasking of Dionysius as a pseudonymous author with his recognition of the close doctrinal proximity between Proclus and Dionysius. Cusanus writes "The great Dionysius imitates Plato" (*De beryllo* 27) and in his *Apologia doctae ignorantiae* (*A Defense of Learned Ignorance*, 1449) states that "the divine Dionysius imitated Plato to such an extent that he is quite frequently found to have cited Plato's words in series" (*Apologia* 10).[21] In the same work, he speaks of the "divine Plato" and of the *Parmenides* as opening a "way to God."[22] He quotes Proclus' *Commentary on the Parmenides*[23] to the effect that Plato denied that predications can be made of the first principle, just as Dionysius prefers negative to affirmative theology (*De beryllo* 12). Of course, as an orthodox Christian, Cusanus is fully aware that certain doctrines of classical Platonism (the doctrine of the world soul, of fate, of the eternity of the world, etc.) conflict with Christianity and he takes issue with the *platonici* on these points. For instance, he criticizes Plato for assuming that creation arises from divine necessity rather than from divine free will (*De beryllo* 38).

Cusanus has been thought to have influenced Descartes's account of the infinite universe. Descartes, in a letter of 6 June 1647 to Père Chanut, marvels at the philosophical acumen of Queen Christina of Sweden as displayed in her comments on the supposed size of the universe (as calculated by Descartes). He writes:

> In the first place I recollect that the Cardinal of Cusa and many other doctors have supposed the world to be infinite without ever being censured by the Church; on the contrary, to represent God's works as very great is thought to be a way of doing him honor. And my opinion is not so difficult to accept as theirs, because I do not say that the world is infinite but only that it is indefinite. There is quite a notable difference between the two: for we cannot say that something is infinite without a reason to prove this such as we can give only in the case of God; but we can say that a thing is indefinite simply if we have no reason to prove that the thing has bounds.[24]

In this brief reference, Descartes presents Cusanus as anticipating modern Galilean science by maintaining that the universe is infinite.[25] Koyré credits Cusanus with being the first to break with the closed medieval conception of the cosmos by conceiving of the universe as infinite.[26] Descartes himself maintains that the conception of matter as extension does not convey the idea of boundaries, and hence he designates it as "indefinite" and resists declaring it to be "infinite" since there "may be some reasons which are known to God though incomprehensible to me."[27] More accurately, however, Cusanus did not hold that the universe is actually either infinite or finite, but rather that it is "indeterminate" or "unbounded" (*interminatum, sine termino*, *DDI* II.1.97), lacking precision and hence definition, and



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hence "privatively infinite" (*privative infinitum*, *DDI* II.1.97). Cusanus reasons that the universe is indeterminate because it is mutable and hence cannot be precisely known. Every created being is limited by its potency whereas the divine infinity, which is at once infinite power and infinite actuality, is alone "that which can be every potency" (*id quod esse potest omni potentia, DDI* II.1.97).

Besides this influence on Descartes, it is now thought likely that Cusanus had a subterranean influence on Spinoza and Leibniz. Some of Cusanus' formulations ("God is actually all that He can be" or God is actually every possibility, *ut sit actu omne id quod possibile est*, *DDI* I.5.14) anticipate Spinoza's concept of a God as the actualization of all possibilities.[28] Cusanus' "all things exist in the best way they are able to exist" (*omnia sunt eo meliori modo quo esse possunt, DDI* I.5.13) may be compared with Leibniz's best of all possible worlds.[29]

It is clear that one cannot simply present Cusanus as a Cartesian modern since he displays almost no interest in subjectivity (the *cogito*), although he is deeply interested in the related problem of perspective. Cusanus' supposed modernity is in part justified by his frequent and original use of mathematical analogies. Cusanus is a strong advocate of employing mathematics to assist in the contemplation of the divine. Knowledge of the world comes through the "mirror" of mathematical symbolism (*De possest* I.43). However, his employment of mathematics is for entirely traditional purposes. Following Augustine, Boethius, and ultimately Pythagoras, he uses mathematical examples (*exemplo mathematico*, *DDI* I.24.74) as a kind of spiritual exercise to express theological insights. For instance, in *De possest* (*On Actualized Possibility*) I.23, he invokes a spinning top, which, as it spins faster, appears to be standing still, as an exercise for conceiving the God who is the "coincidence of opposites." Cusanus endorses Pythagoras' claim that "all things are constituted and understood through the power of numbers" (*DDI* I.1.3) and the scriptural (and Boethian) claim that God made all things in number, measure and weight (*DDI* III.1.182; see Boethius, *Consolation* III.9). Number is the "prime exemplar of the things to be created" (*DDI* I.11.32).

Despite his admiration for mathematics Cusanus credits his friend and contemporary, Cardinal Giuliano Cesarini, for the insight that the precision of truth is unattainable with regard to things in this world (*De coniecturis* I.2). In fact, the second book of *De docta ignorantia*, ostensibly about the created universe, is really aimed at demolishing the view that the traditional sciences of the quadrivium can yield accurate truth about the universe.

Curiously, however, this very limitation of mathematics in Cusanus is seen by the German historian of ideas Hans Blumenberg as actually a very modern trait. Blumenberg argues that the origins of the modern scientific worldview



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lie in medieval mysticism.[30] According to his thesis, Cusanus' real contribution is his recognition of the "self-restriction" of knowledge (as expressed in *docta ignorantia*) as an essential component of genuine scientific method:

> It is a constitutive element of the modern age that it expands through restriction, achieves progressions through critical reduction: Renunciation of the principle of teleology discloses for the first time the full efficacy of the application of the causal category to nature; the elimination of the question of substance, and its replacement by the universal application of quantity, makes mathematical natural science possible; and renunciation of the phantom of the requirement of absolute accuracy made possible an exactitude that can set itself tolerances for its inaccuracy. The knowledge of the modern age was decisively rendered possible by a knowledge of what we cannot know.[31]

Blumenberg presents Cusanus as a modern on the basis that the knowledge of one's ignorance is a central element in the modern idea of science.[32]

Indeed, it is true that Cusanus is preoccupied with the nature and limits of human knowledge. One can therefore speak of an epistemological, if not quite a subjective, turn in his work.[33] While he acknowledges the importance of incremental knowledge, where we proceed from the known to the unknown by precise inferences, genuine advances are made when we become aware of the limits of human knowledge. Thus, the lack of certain knowledge about the universe is not a contingent failing, but embedded in the uncertain and inexact nature of the universe itself. For humans to realize this is to free themselves to contemplate God.

Paradoxically, while Cusanus' stress on the limits of human knowledge is often seen as an anticipation of the modern epistemological turn (paradigmatically expressed in Kant), it is also profoundly traditional, following on from the Pauline and Augustinian tradition that sees all human reasoning as "conjectural" and as failing to achieve oneness with its object. There is undoubtedly a certain modernity in his recognition that perceptual knowledge is always perspectival; that sight, for instance, gives things from one side and under a certain aspect which brings a certain "otherness" (*alteritas*) into our knowledge. When one beholds a face, one does it from a particular angle (*De coniecturis* I.11.57). But this is coupled with a traditional Platonic outlook, e.g. that there is always a gap between the intelligible ideal and the sensible thing. A pure circle is an ideal entity, a mental creation (*ens rationis*), but a visible circle always possesses a certain "otherness" (*De coniecturis*, I.11.54). Cusanus' interest, however, is not in a modern celebration of the multiplicity of subjective perspectives but is in the more Neoplatonic project of overcoming perspectival limitation and "otherness" to gain intellectual oneness with the object itself.



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Being one with the infinite one is the real problem. The infinite is precisely that which cannot be measured and which therefore cannot be an object of the mind as measurer.[34] In *De coniecturis* (*On Surmises*) 1.8.35, he writes: "Reason analyzes all things in terms of multitude and magnitude." Every inquiry makes use of comparison and relation (*proportio*), but *proportio* indicates agreement in one respect, otherness in other respects (*DDI* 1.1.3). Number is needed to understand *proportio*, even though the precise relations between corporeal things surpasses human understanding. Reason is beset by "otherness"; only intellect, employed in a certain way, can gain oneness through a certain kind of self-negation and self-transcendence.

## Life and writings

Cusanus was born in 1401 in Kues (now Bernkastel-Kues) on the Moselle river east of Trier.[35] He left home early to join the household of Count Theoderic of Manderscheid, who sponsored his education.[36] In 1416 he entered the arts faculty at the University of Heidelberg, but a year later transferred to the law faculty at Padua. Here he spent six years studying mathematics, astronomy, and physics, and became friendly with Giuliano Cesarini (1398–1444), later the cardinal to whom Cusanus dedicated his *De docta ignorantia*, and Paolo Toscanelli (1397–1482), the famous mathematician and astronomer, with whom he renewed contact in later life. He received his doctorate in law in 1423.

In 1425 he enrolled in the University of Cologne to study philosophy and theology before his ordination. The Council of Basel had begun in 1431 and Nicholas arrived there in 1432 as secretary to Ulrich von Manderscheid who was seeking election to the bishopric of Trier. Cusanus was initially a conciliarist but later shifted to the papal side. Somewhere between 1436 and 1440 he was ordained a priest and in 1437 he traveled to Constantinople to invite representatives of the estranged Orthodox Church of Byzantium to a council. While there he met the Emperor, the patriarch, and the monk Bessarion, but he also acquired some Greek manuscripts including the *Theologia Platonica* of Proclus. It was on his journey back to Venice that he had the vision which, he claimed, inspired his first philosophical treatise, *De docta ignorantia* (1440).

From the outset Cusanus was focused on the difficulty of gaining knowledge of God. An early sermon, *In principio erat verbum* (*In the Beginning Was the Word*, 1438), already recognizes the immensity, unnameability, and unknowability of the divine.[37] His first short dialogue between a pagan and a Christian, *De Deo abscondito* (*On the Hidden God*, 1444/5) opens with the question: how does one seriously adore what one does not know?[38] It goes



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on to propose that by knowing that one does not know one has arrived at a kind of higher truth.

Between 1440 and 1444 Cusanus wrote *De coniecturis*, a companion piece to *De docta ignorantia*,[39] denying the possibility of exact knowledge. The mind as *imago Dei* proceeds through the conjectures it creates, just as God creates real things. Man is a microcosm of the universe and a "humanized God" (*deus humanatus*, *De dato* 102) or "second God" (quoting Hermes Trismegistus in *De beryllo* 7), themes later repeated by Pico della Mirandola.

In 1448 Cusanus was created a cardinal and given a titular church in Rome. In 1450 he was elected bishop of Brixen in Tyrol, although he did not take up residence there until 1452. In 1450, during a period of intense activity at Rome, he wrote a number of important scientific and philosophical works including *Idiota de mente* (*The Layman on Mind*), *De sapientia* (*On Wisdom*), *De staticis experimentis* (*On Experiments Done with Weight-Scales*), *Transmutationes geometricae* (*Geometrical Transformations*), *Arithmeticum complementum* (*Arithmetical Compendium*) and *Quadratura circuli* (*Squaring the Circle*).

In 1453 Cusanus' overall philosophical outlook was further confirmed when he read Proclus. He wrote his *De visione dei* (*The Vision of God*), *De mathematicis complementis* (*Complementary Mathematical Considerations*), *De pace fidei* (*The Peace of Faith*) and, in 1458, *De beryllo* (*On the Prism*), which comments at length on the manner in which Plato, Aristotle, and Dionysius interpreted God and his relation to created things.[40] Divine unity produces diversity just as a single ray shining through the prism is refracted into many parts. In this work, Cusanus insists – against Plato – that numbers are rational entities, mental constructs, which prove Protagoras' saying that man is the measure of all things: "And so, Plato is seen wrongly to have concluded – when he saw that mathematical entities, which are abstracted from perceptible objects, are truer in the mind – that therefore they have another, still truer, supra-intellectual being" (*De beryllo* 56).[41]

In 1459 Cusanus was appointed vicar-general of Rome and the Papal States in the absence of the pope. At this time he wrote *Reformatio generalis*, a plan to reform the Curia.[42] On his return from Rome in 1460 he was taken prisoner by Sigismund, duke of Austria. Cusanus was forced to grant his captor military control over Brixen, but after his release he returned to Italy and renounced these agreements. He never again visited Brixen, and withdrew from politics to a more contemplative form of life. In 1459 he wrote *De aequalitate* (*On Equality*) and *De principio* (*On the Beginning*) and in 1460 he wrote *Trialogus de possest*; in 1461 *De cribatione Alchorani* (*Sifting the Koran*), a study of the Koran. In 1462 he wrote *De li non aliud* (*On the Non-Other*) and in 1464 he wrote *De ludo globi* (*The Game of*



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*Spheres*), *De apice theoriae* (*From the Summit of Contemplation*), and *De venatione sapientiae* (*The Hunt for Wisdom*), which recapitulates many of his earlier themes. *De ludo globi* uses the example of the movement of balls or spheres as metaphors for understanding the manner in which the soul moves the body. On 11 August 1464 Cusanus died in the town of Todi in Umbria.

## Cusanus and philosophy

Nicholas was primarily a cleric and an ecclesiastical diplomat and therefore a dilettante in philosophy. He wrote at a time when the influence of the Aristotelian schools had come under increasing criticism, and his somewhat dismissive attitude to the Peripatetics is typical of the humanist age. He regards Aristotle as "very profound" (*DDI* I.1.4) and to have been right to say the entire world divides up into substance and accident (*DDI* I.18.53), but he also thinks of him as rather puffed up, wanting to show his greatness by refuting others (*DDI* I.11.32). The Aristotelian Johannes Wenck von Herrenberg (*c.* 1390–1460), a theologian from Heidelberg, accused him of pantheism, and claimed Cusanus "cares little for the sayings of Aristotle."[43] In his reply to Wenck, Cusanus himself regrets that the Aristotelian sect now prevails (*Apologia* 6).

As a Neoplatonist, Cusanus understands Aristotle to be a modified Platonist; Aristotle's supposed differences from Plato are more verbal than real (*DDI* II.9.148). Cusanus thinks the Peripatetics are simply wrong to deny the existence of Forms, understood as exemplars (*DDI* II.9.147), but he accepts many aspects of the scholastic approach to finite beings: they are composed of substance and accident, matter and form, act and potency. Furthermore, he accepts the Aristotelian dicta that nothing is in the mind that was not formerly in the senses, that all knowing requires the mediation of a phantasm, and the Boethian formula that "whatever is received is received according to the mode of the recipient." But he does not accept the Thomistic claim that genuine knowledge of God can be reached through the analogy of being. Crucially, Aristotle, although a "most careful and consistent reasoner," failed to recognize the coincidence of contradictories (*De beryllo* 40) in his analysis of privation, although privation is really where contraries coincide.

Cusanus does (quite casually) make use of scholastic argumentation, although he is not committed to the syllogistic form. He seems closer in style to Augustine. Anselm, too, is in the background. For instance, Cusanus adopts Anselm's conception of God in the *Proslogion* as "that than which nothing greater can be thought" or, in another formulation favored by Cusanus, "that



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than which nothing greater is possible" (*quo nihil maius esse potest*, *DDI* 1.2.5). God surpasses all understanding and according to Anselm is "something greater than can be thought" (*quiddam maius quam cogitari possit*, *Proslogion* XV), not just the "greater than everything" (*maius omnibus*) of Gaunilo (*Pro Insipiente* V). For Cusanus, following Anselm, God is "absolute being" (*esse absolutum*); he is actually everything that is possible or that he can possibly be. Cusanus' connection with Anselm is underscored in the *Apologia* where Cusanus remarks: "For no one was ever so foolish as to maintain that God, who forms all things, is anything other than that than which a greater cannot be conceived" (*Apologia* 8).[44] Cusanus builds on Anselm's intuition that God necessarily exists, that God is a necessary being; God is "absolute necessity" (*DDI* 1.22.69).

Cusanus may easily be situated in the emerging humanism of the northern Renaissance, associated not only with Padua but also with the new German universities of Cologne and Heidelberg, heir to the traditions of Albertus Magnus, Meister Eckhart, Dietrich of Freiburg, and others. At the University of Heidelberg, he encountered nominalism, which influenced his thinking in a number of ways, e.g. his conception of infinite divine power, and, in *De docta ignorantia* 1.5.14 and in *De beryllo*, his view of numbers as *entia rationis*. Cusanus exploits the nominalist emphasis on God's absolute power. God is in this sense pure possibility, or the sum of all possibilities. Indeed, Cusanus' specific originality consists in his use of nominalist claims about God's infinite and unlimited power, combined with the scholastic claim that God is pure *esse*, pure actuality, *actus purus*, "maximal actual being" (*maxima actualis entitas*, *DDI* (1.23.70), to make the claim that God is the infinite actualization of all possibilities, *est actu omne id quod possibile est* (*DDI* 1.5.14), God is "wholly in act" (*penitus in actu*). With regard to numbers, Cusanus' allegiance to nominalism is half-hearted at best. In *Idiota de mente*, he treats the numbers in our minds as images of exemplars in the divine mind, which suggests Platonism.[45] Indeed, he expresses himself close to the Pythagoreans, rejecting the view that number is an "abstraction that proceeds from our mind" (*Idiota de mente* 6) and maintaining that our numbers are "images" of divine numbers and that numbers are "the first exemplars of things." In *De mente* also he distances himself from nominalist theories of names and claims that there is a "natural name," which is more or less apt for the thing it names, rejecting the nominalist thesis of absolute conventionality of names.

At Padua Cusanus was exposed to Italian humanism and he both knew and was known to some of its central figures; his name appears often in the correspondence between Poggio Bracciolini and Niccolò Niccoli (1426–7) and he was involved in the humanist book-hunting endeavors of the time.[46]



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On the other hand, *contra* Cassirer, it is probably not the case that Cusanus had a major influence on Ficino or on Pico della Mirandola's *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (1486).[47] Ficino does mention him, but only once, in a letter to Martinus Uranius (Martin Prenninger) of 1489, alluding to "some speculations of Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa" (*quoddam speculationes Nicolai Cusii cardinalis*).[48] Likewise, Pico (1463–94) merely expressed an interest in visiting Cusanus' library at Cues.[49] But Cusanus' humanist credentials are not in doubt, especially his interest in Hermeticism. For instance, he frequently quotes Asclepius on the divinity of man: "For man is god, but not unqualifiedly, since he is man; therefore, he is a human god. Man is also world, but he is not contractedly all things, since he is man; therefore man is a microcosm, or a human world" (*De coniecturis* II.14.143).[50] Interestingly, however, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophers tended to regard him as belonging to the *skeptical* tradition, with skeptical views concerning the finite created order.

But for our purposes he was a dedicated, if eclectic, Christian Neoplatonist in the tradition of Dionysius the Areopagite (pseudo) (and behind him, as Cusanus believes, St. Paul),[51] seeking new ways to articulate the transcendence and infinity of the divinity, and, ultimately, to become one with the Infinite One. Cusanus sought to revitalize the Christian Platonic theological tradition, utilizing the scientific and artistic discoveries of his day – from the mathematics of infinite quantities and the nature of relative motion to the discovery of perspective in painting – to express an ancient and timeless wisdom, namely, the infinite and transcendent nature of the divine, and the way this challenges our contemplation. His twin insights are the infinity of the divine and the method of *docta ignorantia* as a way of expressing this infinitude utilizing the restrictions of finite reasoning. His reasoning closely follows that of Proclus and especially the *Mystical Theology* of Dionysius (pseudo) in arguing from contradictions to the inexpressibility of the One. Thus he contrasts the Infinite One with all that is "other than" the One, leading him to make opaque and paradoxical assertions such as "the not other is not other than the not other" (*De li non aliud* 1). Similarly, his characterization of the divine as the "coincidence of opposites" (*coincidentia oppositorum*) is an attempt to set the divine beyond the oppositions that govern human finite rationality,[52] thereby stressing the *finitude* of the human and the ultimate failure of the Promethean project of absolute scientific knowledge.

## The infinity of the divine

Cusanus is interested primarily in finding appropriate ways to acknowledge and articulate the infinite nature of God. God is "absolute infinity" (*infinitas*



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*absoluta*, *De visione dei* 13): "Now according to the theology of negation, there is not found in God anything other than infinity" (*Et non reperitur in deo secundum theologiam negationis aliud quam infinitas*) (*DDI* 1.26.88).[53] All Cusanus' philosophical treatises, dialogues and sermons should be read as spiritual exercises for conceiving the infinity and transcendence of God. In *De possest* he writes: "For after having very often held very many exceedingly deep meditations with myself, and after having very carefully sought out the writings of the ancients, I have ascertained that the ultimate and deepest contemplation of God is boundless, infinite, and in excess of every concept" (*De possest* 40).[54] The only way to approach this transcendent and incomprehensible infinity is to comprehend it "incomprehensibly." Following Dionysius, Eriugena, Maimonides, and others, human knowledge cannot grasp the divine nature (*DDI* 1.16.44) because God transcends the oppositional concepts employed by human reason. In *De coniecturis* 1.5.20, Cusanus emphasizes strongly that no statement about God is appropriate because God is beyond opposites. Hence, in line with the negative theological tradition, Cusanus must find names for God that somehow express His inexpressible nature. Thus, he describes God, following Anselm, as the "Absolute Maximum" (or "Maximality," *maximitas*, *DDI* 1.2.5).[55] Elsewhere, Cusanus characterizes God conceptually rather than scripturally as: "the Same" (*idem*, *De Genesi*), "Equality" (*aequalitas*, *De aequalitate*), "Is/Can Be" (*possest*),[56] and "Not Other" (*non aliud*). Cusanus employs neologisms for God such as "being-unity" (*on-tas, DDI* 1.8.22), "*iditas*" ("thatness"), and, in *De venatione sapientiae*, *posse ipsum* ("the possible itself").

Cusanus proposes "learned ignorance" (*docta ignorantia*) as the way to attain God in an appropriate way. The phrase itself is traditional and can be found in St. Augustine.[57] It is also ambiguous; it can mean a *cultivated* ignorance, i.e. one that has to be learned; or, a *wise* ignorance, an ignorance which bestows wisdom or learnedness. Both interpretations have been defended by scholars, and indeed both meanings are present in the English words "learned" and "learnèd."

Cusanus frequently invokes the claim (from Plato and Aristotle) that philosophy begins in wonder or amazement (*admiratio*).[58] All humans desire to know, but exact knowledge is impossible, "precise truth inapprehensible" (*DDI* 1.2.8). Truth can only be grasped with a degree of "otherness" (*De coniecturis* II.6.101). He declares – in sympathy with Socrates – that in a certain sense "to know is to be ignorant" (*scire est ignorare*, *DDI* 1.2). His starting point is self-aware ignorance: "the more he knows that he is unknowing, the more learned he will be" (*DDI* 1.1.4). He proposes a new "science of ignorance" (*scientia ignorantiae*, *idiota de sapientiae*, or *doctrina*



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*ignorantiae*, *DDI* II. *Prol*) or "sacred ignorance" (*sacra ignorantia*, *DDI* I.26.87; also *Apologia* 22). It is not a kind of discursive reasoning, which even hunting dogs have, but rather is a kind of seeing with intellect (*intellectuabilitas*, *Apologia* 14), which "transcends the power of reason" (*De beryllo* 1). Reason (which Cusanus associates very closely with mathematics) is bound to the principle of contradiction and false reason results in the "coincidence of opposites" that is anathema to it *qua* reason (*De coniecturis* II.1.76). Human reason is finite and cannot comprehend the infinite (*De coniecturis* II.3.87). On the other hand, it proceeds in finite steps. This increase in its understanding is achieved through the use of its own created entities, its "conjectures" or "surmises" (*De coniecturis*, *Prologue*; also II.9.117) or "symbolisms."[59] The human mind is the form of this world of conjectures. As he later writes in *De beryllo*: "For just as God is the Creator of real beings and of natural forms, so man is the creator of conceptual beings and of artificial forms that are only likenesses of his intellect, even as God's creatures are likenesses of the divine intellect" (*De beryllo* 7).[60] These are aids or symbols that help us toward a truth that is in fact beyond the grasp of reason.

Cusanus claimed in his letter to Cardinal Cesarini that this "learned ignorance" was discovered in a road-to-Damascus experience while at sea between Constantinople and Venice between 27 November 1637 and 8 February 1438. At this time, he claims, he learned to "embrace incomprehensible things incomprehensibly" (*incomprehensibilia incomprehensibiliter amplecterer*, *DDI* 263).[61] Cusanus indicates a strategy in the *Prologue* whereby he acknowledges the "boldness" (*audacia*) of the moves that led to learned ignorance and points out that the monstrous moves us. Here he is recalling Dionysius' and Eriugena's views that the use of monstrous images has its proper place in theology in preparing the mind to move beyond the familiar.

Cusanus undoubtedly found the themes of divine transcendence and immanence in Eriugena's *Periphyseon*. In *Periphyseon* Book One, Eriugena characterizes God as "without beginning" (*sine principio*, *Periphyseon* I.451d), "the infinity of infinities" (*infinitas infinitorum*, *Periphyseon* I.517b), "the opposite of opposites and the contrariety of contraries" (*oppositorum opposition, contrariorum contrarietas, Periphyseon* I.517c), and "above being and non-being."[62] Cusanus too calls God "the opposite of opposites" (*oppositio oppositorum*, *De visione dei* 13), but attributes this phrase to Dionysius (*Divine Names* V). He goes on to emphasize that God as pure Oneness is beyond and "precedes all oppositeness" (*De coniecturis* I.5.21).[63]

Cusanus emphasizes that the transcendent infinity of God means that there is no analogy or proportionality between finite and infinite. The



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transcendent deity or Godhead is not approachable through any kind of analogical reasoning. The infinite God is "incomprehensible" and "inapprehensible" (*inapprehensibilis*, *DDI* I.2.8), dwelling in "inaccessible light" (*lux inacessibilis*). Human minds work using oppositions and these do not apply to God. God cannot be understood on the basis of any created thing. As he says in his *Apologia* 17 what is caused cannot be raised to the status of the cause. We nevertheless have to move from the image to the exemplar. All forms of proportion or adding one thing to another will not give us the infinite. The "method" of attaining the infinite will be to grasp it in terms of the very oppositions and contradictions that are the basis of our human rational powers ("reason cannot leap beyond contradictories," *DDI* I.24.76). Thus, *possest* (actualized possibility) as a term for God surpasses reason and awakens the intellect to a mystical vision of God.

Cusanus begins with the Augustinian, Eriugenian and Thomistic formulations of God as the "cause of all things," the "being of beings" (*entitas rerum*, *DDI* I.8.22), or "being of all being" (*entitas omnis esse*, *DDI* I.23.73), and the "form of forms" (*forma formarum*, *DDI* II.2.103).[64] In Eckhartian fashion, he then denies that God is "this or that." God is not so much being or a substance as, following Dionysius, "more than substance" (*DDI* I.18.52). Following Eriugena, Cusanus calls God *nihil omnium*, the nothing of all things (*DDI* I.16.43), who is also *omnia simul*, all things simultaneously (*DDI* III.3.197).

As a Neoplatonist, Cusanus holds that all things are contained or "enfolded" in God but that they are also "unfolded" in the universe. This is the dialectic of *complicatio* and *explicatio*, terms which Cusanus takes from Thierry of Chartres: "as enfolded in God all these things are God; similarly, as unfolded-in-the-created-world they are the world" (*omnia illa complicite in deo esse deus, sicut explicite in creatura mundi sunt mundus*, *De possest* I.9).[65] Creatures are either enfolded in the One by *complicatio*,[66] or unfolded from the One in *explicatio*.[67] God is the *unitas complicans*. Corporeal oneness is the most "unfolded" form of oneness. God is, according to *Idiota de mente* 4, "the enfolding of enfoldings."[68] Cusanus in his *De coniecturis* also claims to find these concepts in Dionysius. Cusanus maintains that this dialectic of *complicatio* and *explicatio* cannot be understood and surpasses the mind (*DDI* II.3.109). Cusanus applies the dialectic of *explicatio* and *complicatio* even to explain the relationship between faith and understanding: in faith all understandable things are enfolded, whereas in knowledge they are unfolded (*DDI* III.11.244).

Cusanus acknowledges that, in truth, "God transcends understanding and *a fortiori* every name." Nevertheless, like many medieval Platonists (one thinks of Eriugena here), Cusanus accepts the Neoplatonic account, but



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with a more direct familiarity with Plato's *Parmenides* and Proclus, of the divine as simple "oneness" (*unitas*, *DDI* I.24.76), "infinite oneness" (*unitas infinita*, *DDI* II.3.109), although it is not a oneness to which "otherness" is opposed. God is "all in all" (*omnia in omnibus*, 1 Cor. 15:28). God is pure identity. Indeed, in God even diversity (*diversitas*) is identity (*DDI* II.9.149). Everything not one is subsequent to the One, and belongs to "otherness" (*alteritas*), the sign of multiplicity and "mutability" (*mutabilitas*, *DDI* I.7.18).[69] Otherness is defined as "one thing and another" (*DDI* I.7.18). All things that are not absolutely one are other than the one. The other is always temporal and not eternal. Whatever is finite has a beginning and an end (I.6.15) The pluralities of things "descend" from the infinite oneness (I.5.14) and cannot exist independently of it. They have *abesse* or being-from (*DDI* II.3.110) rather than *esse*, being: i.e. their being is always a dependent being. Creatures receive the infinite form of the divine in a finite manner. The creature, then, is *infinitas finite*, finitely infinite.

God creates only in so far as he is One and what he creates are unities (*DDI* II.2.99). God as a pure identity cannot partake of difference or otherness. Otherness is outside of and subsequent to the One. Otherness is responsible for plurality. Otherness is not caused and is identical with contingency (*contingentia*). For Cusanus, otherness does not belong to the essence of a thing (*Idiota de mente* 6).[70] It is not a positive principle (*De visione dei* 14).[71] Otherness is associated with mutability: "For otherness is identical with mutability" (*Alteritas namque idem est quod mutabilitas*, *DDI* I.7.18).[72]

As Cusanus claims, "All perceptible things are in a state of continual instability because of the material possibility abounding in them" (*DDI* I.11.31).[73] Corruptibility, divisibility, imperfection, diversity, and plurality: these are all marks of the universe, but they have no positive cause. They are, as it were, the result of pure contingency and of absence or being-from. A finite thing can receive an infinite form only contractedly (*DDI* II.2.104).

There are some complexities in Cusanus' view of the otherness and multiplicity of creation. He accepts that God is one and that his creative act is undiminished; nevertheless creation is plural. In *Idiota de mente*, Cusanus maintains that plurality comes from God's way of thinking: "The plurality of things comes into being because the divine mind understands one thing in one way and another thing in another way" (*Idiota de mente* 6.94). Cusanus is never entirely clear whether plurality or multiplicity emerges from the divine power directly or whether it is the result of "otherness." This is a typically Neoplatonic problem, and in his approach to it Cusanus simply restates the problem rather than solving it.

Although believers must approach God through affirmative theology (*DDI* I.26.86), this must be tempered with negative theology, or else the



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worship of the divine will become "idolatry" (*idolatria*). Believers must realize that if God is light, he is not a corporeal light to which darkness is opposed but an infinite and most simple light (*DDI* 1.26.86). God must be approached symbolically (*aenigmatice*) or through images (*phantasmate*, *De possest* 1.19). Here numbers and illustrations from arithmetic, physics, astronomy, and geometry are of the greatest importance. Visible things are images of invisible things and from created things we can grasp the Creator in a mirror and symbolically (*DDI* 1.11.30). Cusanus wants to take finite mathematical relations and proportions and using a special kind of transformation (*transferre*) to think of them infinitely (*DDI* 1.12.33). Thus, to give an example, Anselm considered God to be *rectitudo* and Cusanus proposes to think of *rectitudo* symbolically as a straight line. Others have considered God as a circle. But Cusanus wants us to intellectually realize that, taken to the infinite, an infinite line, triangle, circle, and sphere will all coincide (*DDI* 1.13.35). All essences of distinct things actually coincide when taken to the infinite in the divine. Thus "by means of mathematical example" (*exemplo mathematico*, *DDI* 1.24.74) the infinite divine being can be comprehended in learned ignorance.

The universe is best understood by number. Without number there would be no otherness: "For if number is removed, the distinctness, order and comparative relation, and harmony of things cease" (*DDI* 1.5.13).[74] Number is responsible for the *proportio* and harmony between things (*DDI* 1.5.13). Number encompasses all things related proportionally. Indeed all inquiry moves according to proportion and relation, but – and this is crucial – there is no proportion between finite and infinite (*DDI* 1.1.3). Number belongs not only to quantity, but to all things that can agree or differ substantially or accidentally. There would be no distinctness between things were it not for number; even between two equal things, one will be a duplicate of the first (echoing Proclus). Furthermore, every actual number is finite and hence no number can be the maximum. Otherness is always "subsequent to oneness" (*DDI* 1.7.18). Between two things there will at least be "otherness" (*DDI* 1.7.19). The number 2 is both "separation (*divisio*) and a cause of separation" (*DDI* 1.7.20). Union (*unio*) and oneness are prior to twoness as eternity is prior to finitude and identity is prior to difference.

Koyré credits Cusanus with breaking down the hierarchy of the medieval closed universe and of transferring from the divine to the universe the mystical pseudo-Hermetic notion of unity within infinity: "We cannot but admire the boldness and depth of Nicholas of Cusa's cosmological conceptions which culminate in the astonishing transference to the universe of the pseudo-Hermetic characterization of God: 'a sphere of which the center is everywhere and the circumference is nowhere.'"[75] In *De docta ignorantia* 1.12.5, Cusanus says the divine is an "infinite sphere."[76] In fact, Cusanus had



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found this metaphor in Eckhart, who in turn had borrowed it from the popular compilation, *Liber XXIV philosophorum* (*The Book of the Twenty-Four Philosophers*), whose second definition states: "Deus est sphaera infinita cuius centrum est ubique, circumferentia nusquam."[77] This is a powerful image and Cusanus exploits it as an imaginative or symbolic "conjecture" about the divine. But it is only one among many images of united contradictories which are found throughout his work.

## The coincidence of contradictories

Cusanus does not actually say in the text of *De docta ignorantia* that God is the "coincidence of opposites" (*coincidentia oppositorum*), as Jasper Hopkins has pointed out.[78] But, in his dedicatory letter, he speaks of God as that "where contradictions coincide" (*ubi contradictoria coincidunt*). In his next major work, *De coniecturis* II.1, however, God is described as *beyond* the coincidence of contradictories. In general, Cusanus does not distinguish between "opposites" (or contraries) and "contradictories." Echoing Dionysius and Eriugena ("opposite of opposites without opposition"), God is described as "beyond all opposition" (*supra omnem oppositionem*, *DDI* I.4.12), "free of all opposition" (*DDI* I.4.12), "beyond all affirmation and negation" (*super omnem affirmationem et negationem*, *DDI* I.4.12), "the opposition of opposites" (*oppositio oppositorum*, *Apologia* 41, citing Dionysius' *Divine Names* V.10). For Eriugena, God is the opposite of opposites without opposition. God reconciles all oppositions and indeed is beyond all oppositions. Furthermore, the Maximum, though it may be thought of as being, is not opposed to non-being (*DDI* I.6.16).

Creation is not one because it descends from unity, but neither is creation many; rather it is (in a way reminiscent of Plotinus' *hen-polla*) "both one [*una*] and many [*plura*] conjunctively [*copulative*]" (*DDI* II.2.100). Creation, however, is seen as a descent from oneness to otherness (see Fig. 9.1, from *De coniecturis* I.10).

By partaking in the One all things are what they are (*De coniecturis* II.1.71). The being of creatures is *ab-esse*, "being-from," dependent being, or *ad-esse*, "being-to," accidental being. The diversity of creatures is a product of pure contingency. Cusanus agrees with Augustine, Eriugena, and Eckhart that, considered in themselves, all creatures are pure nothingness: "Every creature, we surmise, lies between God and nothing" (*De coniecturis*. I.9.42). Cusanus' difficulties in articulating the relation between divine form and created form in part stem from his refusal to accept the Aristotelian–Thomistic account of substantial form. He remains a Platonist with regard to his account of form. This Platonism is



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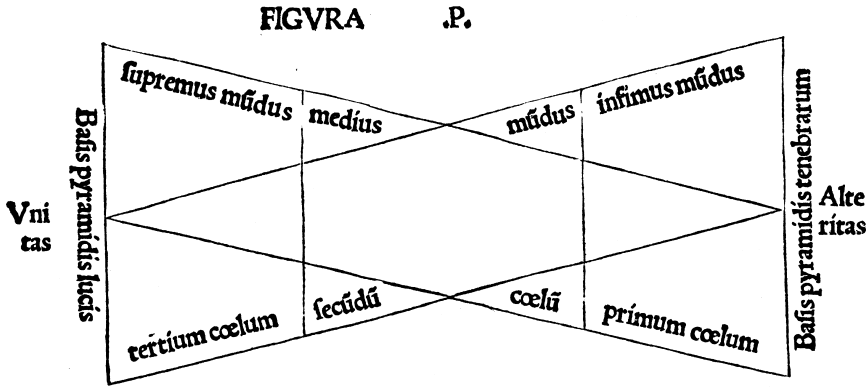


Figure 9.1: Source: *Opera Nicolai Cusae Cardinalis*, Paris 1514, vol. I, fol. XLVI verso

Augustinian, in the sense that he holds that the essence of anything is higher in the soul than it is in the thing: "the essence of a hand exists more truly in the soul than in the hand" (*De possest* I.12). Moreover, the forms of all things are eternally one in God (*De possest* I.22).

## Conclusion

Nicholas of Cusa is a truly transitional figure. At heart he is a conservative Platonic theologian, seeking names for the infinite God. His aim is always to show the finitude of human knowledge, and to instruct us in our ignorance. This is the "instruction of ignorance" (*doctrina ignorantiae*, *DDI* II *Prol.* 90). On the other hand, his entirely medieval stress on reason as a measure leads him to an emphasis on the primary function of reasoning as measuring and quantifying. Hence he tends to equate the processes of reason with the processes of mathematics (see *De coniecturis* II.2.80) and in that sense is anticipating the use of mathematical reason in seventeenth-century scientists and philosophers. Again, anticipating Galileo, he sees the book of nature as that in which the intention of the divine mind is inscribed (*De beryllo* 66). Cusanus' meditation on the infinite, his Platonist cosmology, and his appreciation of mathematics as the most exact way of contemplating the inexact created order, certainly helped prepare the intellectual world for the Galilean revolution.

## NOTES

1. His works are cited in this chapter wherever possible from the Heidelberg Academy edition, cited here as Nicholas of Cusa 1932–. Over twenty volumes have now been published, including several volumes of sermons (he wrote over 300 sermons in all). The *Acta Cusana* series of the Heidelberg Academy



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(Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1976–) also publishes source material on his life. There is an active Cusanus Gesellschaft in Germany and an American Cusanus Society, which produces an informative newsletter. A recent guide is Bellitto, Izbicki, and Christianson 2004.

2. Copleston 1953, 231.
3. Haubst 1988, 6.
4. Cassirer 1927.
5. Cassirer 1911, I: 38.
6. Koyré 1957.
7. Gadamer 1970, 39–48.
8. Blumenberg 1985.
9. Beierwaltes 1980.
10. Harries 1975, 5–15. See also Harries 2001.
11. See Hopkins 2002, who reviews sixteen theses attributed to Cusanus that have a modern ring, including claims that time, space and the categories belong to the mind. Hopkins sees him as "the first German philosopher" and as a modern philosopher but not as "father" of modern philosophy, which he maintains is Descartes.
12. Blumenberg 1985, 484.
13. In 1469 the Italian humanist Giovanni Andrea de' Bussi (1417–75), personal secretary to Cusanus from 1458 to 1464 and a pioneer of printing in Italy, eulogized him in the preface to his edition of the first volume of Jerome, calling Cusanus the most learned of men and referring specifically to his interest in the recently invented sacred art of printing.
14. Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia*, in Nicholas of Cusa 1932 (vol. I, ed. E. Hoffmann and R. Klibansky); English translation in Nicholas of Cusa 1985. Hereafter referred to as *DDI* followed by the book, chapter, and paragraph number.
15. Weizsäcker 1964.
16. In 1429 he even discovered a manuscript containing twelve previously unknown plays of Plautus. On Cusanus' library see Bianca 1980 and Bianca 1993.
17. See Cranz 2000a and 2000b.
18. Dionysius is cited several times in the *Apologia*. Cusanus in fact refers to Dionysius twice in his *De concordantia catholica* of 1433, but these references might have been drawn from indirect sources; see Hankins and Palmer 2007.
19. See Beierwaltes 1994. Besides Eriugena's translations of Dionysius, Cusanus, at the very least, was familiar with *Periphyseon* Book I, which he owned and annotated in manuscript (see Eriugena MS), as well as the *Clavis Physicae* of Honorius Augustodunensis (see Honorius MS), a compendium of Eriugenian excerpts, and the homily *Vox spiritualis* (which passed under the name of Origen).
20. Albertus Magnus 1972 (*Super Dionysium De divinis nominibus*), cited in *De Beryllo* 17.
21. Translated in Nicholas of Cusa 1984, 466.
22. For a full list of Cusanus' Platonic references, see Führer 2002.
23. See Proclus 1864, VI, col. 1074, translated in Proclus 1987, 427: "So then it is more proper to reveal the incomprehensible and indefinable cause which is the One through negations."



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24. Descartes, letter to Chanut, 6 June 1647, in Descartes 1971–, V: 50. English translation from Descartes 1991, 319–320.
25. See Harries 1990.
26. Koyré 1957, 6.
27. Descartes 1971, V: 52; Descartes 1991, III: 320.
28. Copenhaver and Schmitt 1992, 184.
29. See Zimmermann 1852.
30. Blumenberg 1985, 483–547.
31. Ibid., 500.
32. Ibid., 499. Blumenberg's thesis has been extensively analyzed and criticized by Elizabeth Brient 2002.
33. Miller 2002.
34. Cusanus borrows from Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* Ia, q.11, art. 2, the false etymology of *mens* as related to *mensura*.
35. According to Meuthen and Hallauer 1976, entry no. 1, Nicholas was born before 12 April 1401.
36. Jasper Hopkins doubts claims of earlier scholarship linking Cusanus with Deventer; see Hopkins 1987.
37. In Nicholas of Cusa 1932– (vol. XVI, 1, ed. R. Haubst, M. Bodewig, and W. Krämer, 1970), 3. See Flasch 1998, 21–6.
38. In Nicholas of Cusa 1932– (vol. IV, ed. P. Wilpert, 1959); translated in Nicholas of Cusa 1994, 131–7.
39. In Nicholas of Cusa 1932– (vol. III, ed. J. Koch, K. Bormann, and H. G. Senger, 1973); translated in Nicholas of Cusa 1998, 163–257.
40. The latter in Nicholas of Cusa 1932– (vol. XI, ed. H. G. Senger and K. Bormann, 1988); translated (*On the Prism*) in Nicholas of Cusa 1998, 792–838.
41. Translated in Nicholas of Cusa 1998, 818.
42. Text and translation in Nicholas of Cusa 2007.
43. *De ignota litteratura* 22; Latin text edited in Nicholas of Cusa 1984, 23.
44. Translated in Nicholas of Cusa 1984, 464.
45. In Nicholas of Cusa 1932– (vol. V, ed. L. Baur, 1937); translated in Nicholas of Cusa 1989, 71.
46. Bracciolini 1974.
47. Cassirer 1972, 83.
48. See Kristeller 1965a, 66.
49. Garin 1937, 36n.
50. Translated in Nicholas of Cusa 1998, 236.
51. In his late dialogue *De possest* (1460), translated in Nicholas of Cusa 1986, 64–163, Cusanus invokes St. Paul at 2 Cor. 4:18 for the view that "invisible things are eternal. Temporal things are images of eternal things" (*De possest* 2).
52. Blumenberg 1985, 490.
53. Translated in Nicholas of Cusa 1985, 46.
54. Translated in Nicholas of Cusa 1986, 934.
55. *Maximum* as a term for God is found in Anselm, *Monologion* 1, although Cusanus himself claims (*DDI* 1.16.43) to have found it in Dionysius' *Mystical Theology*.
56. *De possest* 14, translated in Nicholas of Cusa 1986, 921. Cusanus explains that the term *possest* is drawn from *posse* ("can be") and *est* ("is") to convey the sense



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that possibility exists absolutely actually in God. Hopkins translates *possest* as "actualized-possibility." God is actually all that is possible; he is the fullest actualization of all possibilities.

57. The phrase can be found in Augustine's *Epistle* 130, where he speaks of humans possessing a "learned ignorance" through the spirit. Cusanus himself frequently claims the phrase comes from Dionysius (see *Apologia* 12).
58. See *Idiota de mente* 1.1, translated in Nicholas of Cusa 1989, 41. For the claim that philosophy begins in wonder, see, for example, Plato, *Theaetetus* 155d, and Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1.2, 982b. See also Cusanus' *De coniecturis* II.11.
59. There are different kinds of surmise – sensible, rational and intellectual – with differing degrees of proximity to truth (*De coniecturis* II.9.117).
60. Translated in Nicholas of Cusa 1998, 794.
61. Translated in Nicholas of Cusa 1985, 158.
62. This passage is also contained in Honorius' *Clavis physicae* (see n. 19, above).
63. See also *Apologia* 15; *De li non aliud* 19. Cusanus recognizes the concept of a unity prior to opposites in Proclus' *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides* (Proclus 1864, VI, col. 1077).
64. Also found in Thierry of Chartres' *Lectiones* II.38 (see Thierry of Chartres 1971).
65. Translated in Nicholas of Cusa 1986, 918.
66. Compare Anselm: "You [God] fill and encompass all things" (*Tu ergo imples et complecteris omnia*, *Proslogion* XX).
67. Cusanus' *explicatio* is similar to Eriugena's *processio* or *proodos*; see Riccati 1983.
68. Translated in Nicholas of Cusa 1989, 65.
69. Cusanus takes this from Thierry of Chartres 1971, *Lectiones* I 33: "for where there is alterity there is plurality" (*nam ubi alteritas ibi est pluralitas*). Boethius in his *De Trinitate* 1. 6 asserts that "alterity is the principle of plurality" (*principium pluralitatis est alteritas*) and Thierry develops this in his two *Commentaries on Boethius*, which Nicholas knew. For Thierry *alteritas* descends from the One and is identical with matter.
70. Translated in Nicholas of Cusa 1989, 74–5.
71. See McTighe 1990.
72. Nicholas of Cusa 1985, 13.
73. Ibid., 18.
74. Ibid., 10.
75. Koyré 1957, 18.
76. See Mahnke 1937 and Harries 2001.
77. Anonymous 1989, esp. pp. 93–6. The editor of this work, F. Hudry, traces it back to the lost *De philosophia* of Aristotle and provides a helpful list of discussions of God as a sphere in Marius Victorinus' *Adversus Arianum* 1, 60, and elsewhere, but notes that the description of God as *infinite* sphere seems unique to the *Liber XXIV philosophorum*.
78. Nicholas of Cusa 1985, 6.



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# 10

LODI NAUTA

# Lorenzo Valla and the rise of humanist dialectic

## Humanism and scholasticism

In the Renaissance there were two main approaches to the study and teaching of language. Though the period is traditionally associated with the development of humanism, scholasticism was far from dead. University arts courses continued to be based on the Aristotelian Organon and the specialized textbooks of late medieval logic. In Italy, the cradle of humanism, this logic was imported from the mid-fourteenth century onward where it flourished throughout the fifteenth century, with Paul of Venice's *Logica parva* as one of the most important textbooks. Apart from a host of technical logical issues which were being discussed, broader issues continued to provoke debate, such as whether words signify concepts or things and whether language was naturally or conventionally significant, and there was no lack of subtle answers.[1] However hostile to the "pettifogging schoolmen" they professed to be, early modern philosophers such as Descartes, Hobbes, and Locke were obviously indebted to their ideas, and often their own theories consisted in a simplification and revision of scholastic terminology and distinctions without radically changing the linguistic paradigm.[2]

The rise and growth of humanism, however, is the most visible sign of change in the Renaissance (though its origins went back to the late thirteenth century), and it is to the humanists' reform of the arts of the trivium that this chapter is devoted. Obviously, this is a huge theme, and no attempt has been made here to cram into the space of one book chapter all the important names and their works – Valla, Agricola, Erasmus, Sturm, Vives, Lefèvre d'Étaples, Latomus, Melanchthon, Ramus, to mention just a few key figures.[3] It would be like leafing through a telephone directory: lots of names but still no connection. So two humanists have been singled out for a more detailed exposition: Lorenzo Valla and – more briefly – Rudolph Agricola, for they are generally held responsible, each in his own way, for having inaugurated the transformation of Aristotelian–scholastic logic into a humanist dialectic.



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Humanist dialectic is marked by a study of argumentation and forms of reasoning that were tailored to the practical goal of analyzing the argumentative structures of classical texts, then using this knowledge in composing one's own persuasive discourse of whatever kind.

Not all modern scholars, however, have been convinced of the *philosophical* importance of the humanists' achievement, and some historians of logic have even accused the humanists of impeding the progress of formal logic.[4] True, the humanists made important contributions to classical and biblical scholarship, to literature and history, but their calumnies against the scholastics should be dismissed as misdirected and irrelevant, since they stemmed from a failure to recognize the fundamentally different research goals of the scholastics. The scholastics approached language, reasoning, and argumentation from an almost scientific point of view, much in the vein of modern linguists and logicians. They studied language in order to lay bare the logical forms inherent in it. They were interested in the properties of terms and how terms were related to things in the world, and tried to formalize patterns of reasoning in order to establish truth conditions and rules of inference. What made their studies vulnerable to the scornful laughter of the humanists was their use of Latin – a particular idiom of Latin to be sure – based on the medieval Latin spoken in the universities. Hence, humanists could believe that they shared the same interests, the Latin language. And what better and more natural way to analyze language could there be – so the humanists countered – than to examine the linguistic practice of the great Latin writers in order to determine the meaning of terms and rules of grammar and syntax? Such an objection is perfectly understandable but, one may argue, it misses the point, for the scholastics did not aim at analyzing this or any other particular brand of Latin at all but language in general. And in the absence of symbolic notational systems, they could only have recourse to their own language, which was the Latin of the schools. This language then functioned as a kind of metalanguage, a technical jargon which is virtually inherent in all kinds of theoretical speculation, and it was certainly not meant to rival the classical Latin resurrected by the humanists. Yet it was not solely a metalanguage, for in making semantic claims about particular words, word classes and grammatical constructions, they also turned it into their *object* of study, and here the humanists obviously had a foothold for attack.

While neo-Latinists and literary historians may at times tend to copy uncritically the disparaging attitude of the humanists towards the scholastics, historians of logic should realize that the rise of disciplines such as informal logic, argumentation theory, and pragmatics in the twentieth century have demonstrated that there is room for another, more informal approach to language and reasoning, which ties logic more closely to real language and



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real arguments, to the way people actually speak, write, and argue. (This is not to say that it should *replace* the formal type of approach. The two can coexist, as they do in modern logic.) That humanists "selected" classical Latin as the language par excellence, in which people *ought* to speak and write, is immaterial. Their point is, one may say, that language cannot be abstracted from the living context in which it functions and from which it derives its meaning and power. This had important pedagogical consequences as well. It is a valuable point which has been repeated, in various different guises, in later times.[5] Of course, some humanists did not always fully realize the implications of all this. Most of them were content to stress the aesthetic and moral qualities of classical Latin and its practical use in public life. Lorenzo Valla was a humanist who clearly saw further than this.

## Lorenzo Valla

Lorenzo Valla's contributions to humanism can hardly be overestimated. He gave the humanist program some of its most trenchant and combative formulations, but also put it into practice by studying the Latin language as no one had done before, discussing a host of morphological, syntactical, and semantical features in his widely influential *Elegance in Latin* (*Elegantiae Linguae Latinae*, 1441). But he went even further than this. His aim was to show the linguistic basis of law, theology, philosophy, and in fact all intellectual activities, thus turning the study of language into a sharp-edged tool for exposing all kinds of errors and misunderstandings. Whoever misunderstands the use of words will fall prey to muddled thinking and empty theorizing. Language is the key to thinking and writing. Since only classical Latin was acceptable to Valla and his fellow humanists, post-classical authors were heavily criticized for having adulterated and defaced classical Latin. This does not seem to be a spectacular conclusion in itself: to despise and criticize the scholastic idiom is the humanist's second nature, but Valla's motive was not just aesthetic; it carried a serious philosophical message. This can best be seen in the prefaces to the six books of the *Elegantiae*. For the employment of his method we will look at his reform of Aristotelian–scholastic metaphysics and dialectic, the so-called *Reploughing of Dialectic and Philosophy* (*Repastinatio dialectice et philosophie*, first version 1439).

The *Elegantiae* is not an easy work to summarize or even to characterize. It is often called a handbook, but it is perhaps better viewed as a commentary.[6] In six books comprising 235 brief chapters, Valla criticizes, corrects, and expands on explanations of words, grammar, syntax, and morphology offered by late classical grammarians such as Priscian, Donatus, Servius,



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and Nonus. (Valla's motive for writing is to correct others, as he explicitly concedes in a letter to Giovanni Tortelli.[7]) Based on examples culled from the classical authors, his aim is to show what the right usage of a word, an expression or a construction is. By "right usage" he means grammatically correct and rhetorically effective, *elegantia* standing for semantic precision and refinement rather than for stylishness. Good Latin is even more important than good grammar – a distinction which Valla derives from Quintilian.[8] Following the oratorical ideals formulated by Quintilian, Valla believes that it is more important to speak in accordance with the accepted usage of common speech than to speak in accordance with grammar when viewed as a set of highly regular patterns of word formation.

Thus, common usage (*consuetudo*), based on a close reading of the *auctoritates*, is the fundamental criterion of correct speaking and writing, and as such it also provides an easy yardstick to sift the "barbarians" from those who speak the refined Latin. The barbarians are identified as the Goths and the Gauls, that is, the legal glossators and grammarians and the French logicians and philosophers.[9] More generally, technical discourse or specialized terminology is to be rejected, since it usually consists of neologisms, ungrammatically formed words, or words with a new, unclassical meaning. The primacy given here to the ordinary common speech is fully in line with the classical ideal of the orator, a man full of wisdom and endowed with the best linguistic skills, who dedicates his rhetorical training to the public cause. The orator must teach, delight and persuade, and this can only be done by employing the accepted usage, not the idiom of philosophers or other theoreticians. As Quintilian had written: "usage is the surest guide in speaking, and language should be used as a coin with public stamp." Cicero had used the image of the balance: the orator should not weigh his words in the goldsmith's balance, but rather in a sort of popular scale.[10] Language is primarily a means for communication, for persuasion; the outlandish, esoteric language of the philosophers, logicians, theologians, and medieval legal glossators should be utterly rejected.

The notion of convention and custom becomes, in Valla's hands, part of what has been called – using perhaps too grand a phrase – his "theory of culture."[11] Communal intelligibility is a sine qua non for the development of culture, as Valla makes clear several times. As long as each nation used its own peculiar language, the sciences and arts were "meager and almost nothing": "but when the power of the Romans spread and the nations were brought within its law and fortified by lasting peace, it came about that very many peoples used the Latin language and so had intercourse with each other."[12] Dissociating Latin from the political constellation in which it had originated and developed, Valla holds Latin to be the vehicle of cultural



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growth, and the great motor behind the development of arts, sciences, the legal system, and wisdom in general. This is a common sentiment among humanists from Petrarch onward, but Valla gives it a particular twist in stressing the fact that progress is only made possible by the work of many hands; people like to vie with each other and contend for glory, improving and expanding on the work of others. (One easily recognizes an autobiographical note in Valla's account.) The sharing of a common language leads to a common tradition in which individual achievements are recognized, valued, and compared.

The emphasis on development, growth by competition, conventions, and customs gives Valla's account a modern, descriptive ring, but we should not forget its essentially normative point: while recognizing and accepting the development of Latin in the classical period, he rejects, as noted, any development later than the second century. In aiming at one universal language (which in Valla's case was essentially the Latin spoken between the time of Cicero and Quintilian, and especially the Latin of those two orators themselves), Valla may be said to have pursued a chimera, neglecting the rise of the vernaculars and failing to draw the full consequences of his own view of language as the expression of a culture.[13] For if language is historically embedded and cannot be viewed separately from its users at a particular time in history, it is difficult to see how we can dissociate the Latin language from the Roman Empire, as Valla explicitly does in the preface to the first book.[14] For him, however, as for all humanists, classical Latin was a timeless tool of expression and communication, transcending boundaries of time and place, as were – it was often assumed – the values and views expressed by that language. Thus we seem to have two views of language here, insufficiently distinguished at a conceptual level: on the one hand, language as the expression of a historically and geographically bounded culture with its thought patterns, systems of beliefs, and so forth; on the other hand, Latin as an eternally valid language for developing arts, sciences, literature, and refined communication. In the former sense, language is historically embedded and cannot be viewed apart from the historical and cultural world of its users. In the latter sense, the emphasis is on language as a tool which may be employed, at various times in various cultures, for expressing opinions and beliefs different from those of its original users – a view which implies that the same language can be used for expressing different things.

Perhaps we should not press this conceptual distinction too far, and it would certainly be unfair to criticize Valla for having failed to draw all the implications of his programmatic statements; after all, they gave the humanist movement its ideological underpinning and impetus. But perhaps even more importantly, he showed how his programmatic statements could



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be put into practice. Small wonder then that his *Elegantiae* became a best-seller, commented upon and adapted to teaching by generations of school-teachers and humanists.[15]

But Valla, as already noted, extended his program far beyond the confines of literature and aesthetics. Latin is not just a beautiful, precise, and fine medium to be replicated in oratory, poetry, and prose compositions but should be the alpha and omega in all intellectual pursuits. Its semantic precision and syntactical complexity, its rich vocabulary and power of expression make it a most apt instrument of thinking, writing, and speaking: whoever lacks knowledge of language (*facultas loquendi*) is bound to go wrong.[16] So, a critique of theories, ideas and notions takes, in important ways, the form of a language critique, and Valla is quite explicit about this. No work illustrates this better than his *Repastinatio dialectice et philosophie* in which he attempted to reform Aristotelian–scholastic philosophy and dialectic. He had started the work in Pavia in the early 1430s, and continued to work on it throughout his life; three versions are extant, on the last of which Valla was still working by the time of his death in 1457.[17]

The *Repastinatio* consists of three books. In Book I Valla aims to cut at the roots of Aristotelian–scholastic metaphysics by criticizing some of its fundamental notions, such as the ten categories (substance and nine accidental categories: quality, quantity and relation etc.); the six transcendental terms such as "good," "one" and "true"; concepts such as genus, species and *differentia* (the predicables) by which we can define a thing and allot it a place in the so-called "Tree of Porphyry"; form and matter; act and potency. According to Valla, these terms, concepts, and distinctions, couched in an ungrammatical or even rebarbative Latin, complicate and confuse rather than enlighten and clarify our picture of the world, which should be based on common sense and expressed in good classical Latin. The principal task he has therefore imposed on himself is to cut through this useless "superstructure" of technical jargon and empty concepts by reducing them to what he considers to be the basic elements of a commonsense world view. These basic elements are things we perceive either physically or mentally, and may be described as qualified substances. Thus, "thing" (*res*) is the central term in Valla's account, transcending the three categories substance, quality, and action, which are the only three from the Aristotelian ten he accepts. His methods in bringing about a simplified picture of the world are varied: he frequently relies on Latin grammar to reject terms from scholastic discourse. Thus, the word *ens* (being) is resolved into *id quod est* (that which is) and with *id* (that) being resolved into *ea res* (that thing) we get the result: *ea res que est*. In this way it becomes clear that we do not need the laborious formula "that which is" (*ea que est*): *lapis est ens* (stone is a being) or its analyzed equivalent *lapis est res que est*



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(stone is a thing which is) is an unclear, laborious, and absurd way of just saying that *lapis est res* (stone is a thing).[18] Because *ens* can be resolved into *res*, the latter is of wider application, and has of course the further advantage of being an everyday term. This fits perfectly Valla's aim, to replace all difficult, abstruse metaphysical speculation and concomitant terminology by a common-sense worldview, conveyed through ordinary language (that is, classical Latin), using which we can unproblematically pick out and describe ordinary things. Another well-known example of his grammatical approach is his rejection of scholastic terms such as *entitas*, *hecceitas*, and *quidditas* because they do not conform to the rules of word formation – rules which can be gleaned from a detailed study of classical texts.[19] Related to this analysis is Valla's repudiation of what he presents as the scholastic view of the distinction between abstract and concrete terms, i.e. the view that abstract terms ("whiteness," "fatherhood") always refer to quality only, while concrete terms ("white," "father") refer to substance and quality. In a careful discussion of this distinction, taking into account the grammatical categories of case, number, and gender, Valla rejects the ontological commitments which such a view seems to imply, and shows, on the basis of a host of examples drawn from classical Latin usage, that the abstract term often has the same meaning as its concrete counterpart (*utile/utilitas*, *honestum/honestas*, *verum/veritas*).[20] In other words, there is no need to posit abstract entities as referents of these terms; they refer to the concrete thing itself, that is, to the substance, its quality or action (or a combination of these three components into which a thing can be analyzed). Hence, one of his main concerns throughout the first book is to determine to which category a word refers. This is not always an easy task: "there are many terms whose category is difficult to discern."[21]

These categories – substance, quality, and action – are therefore the only three Valla admits.[22] The rest of the Aristotelian categories such as quantity, relation, time, and place, are to be reduced to these three. The grammatical approach is fully at work here too. For Valla, such qualifications as size, relationship (e.g. fatherhood), position, time and place are in no way different from those traditionally associated with the category of quality such as color and shape. From a grammatical point of view, all these terms are essentially qualitative terms, providing us with information about a substance, i.e. how it is qualified or how it acts. Valla's basic assumption then seems to be that the categories should reflect or point to things in the world, and he has therefore no need for the other categories.

The result is a simplified ontological picture which resembles that of the medieval nominalist William of Ockham. It is therefore not surprising that many scholars have bracketed their names, speaking of Valla's "nominalism" and his "Ockhamism."[23] Their interests, approach, and arguments, however,



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differ vastly. Unlike Valla, Ockham does not want to get rid of the categorical system. As long as one realizes, Ockham says, that categories do not describe things in the world but categorize *terms* by which we signify real substances or real inhering qualities in different ways,[24] the categories can be maintained and the specific features of, for example, relational or quantitative terms can be explored. Thus, Ockham's rejection of a realist interpretation of the categories is accompanied by a wish to *defend* them as distinct groups of terms.[25] An obliteration of the distinction between categories (such as Valla proposed) would precisely be the effect of philosophical realism, Ockham argues, since by believing that, say, "similarity" signifies an independently existing quality in things, relation is reduced to quality, so that there would be no way to distinguish relational terms from quality terms with respect to the mode of signification. His own terminist interpretation therefore is aimed at saving rather than destroying the categorical system. Valla, on the other hand, seems to take categories in a realist sense: they are said to comprise all things and have things as their individual members (*singula*). The categories categorize things or aspects of things rather than terms, even though other statements conflict with such an interpretation.[26] The safest conclusion is that Valla's rather eclectic approach does not allow us to categorize his position either as "nominalist" (let alone "Ockhamist–terminist") or as "realist".

What Valla and Ockham have in common, however, is the idea that from conceptual distinctions and differences at the linguistic level we should be wary of inferring ontological differences, that is, differences and distinctions between things. But they share this notion with a number of other thinkers, and it has of course always been a perennial philosophical question how language does or does not adequately reflect the world (and if it does, how we should characterize this notion of "adequateness," and how do we know when it *is* adequate?). Moreover, the way they circumvent and try to solve this problem is vastly different. Ockham's program is explicitly addressed to the question of how a nominalist, who admits of only singular entities, can explain generality in thought and language without having recourse to universals. His solution, which will not be discussed here, is to ground spoken and written language on the mental language of our concepts, that is, singular entities in the mind which stand for their singular referents. Valla, on the other hand, does not refer to mental concepts as the primary language on which to ground the meanings of spoken and written language. He does not deal with the philosophical problem of generality, and what he writes against the use of abstract terms and concepts is motivated by his aversion to ungrammatical Latin and his wish to stay within the limits drawn by the imagination and the senses.[27]



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For Valla, the grammatical and semantical features of classical Latin offer the best guideline we have for describing the inventory of the world – that is, things or qualified substances – but, interestingly, at various points Valla himself signals that there is no perfect match between things and our linguistic characterization of them. Thus, when we say that qualities are things which "are present to the substance," this wrongly suggests that they can exist apart from each other – "however, we cannot speak otherwise."[28] Moreover, he frequently hints at the limits of our linguistic resources in naming things: there are more things than words for them – an old topos going back to Aristotle (*Sophistical Refutations* 165a11).[29]

Related to this is Valla's acknowledgment that there is a difference between speaking according to "the standard of truth" and "our common way of speaking." For example, words like "rounder" and "fuller" are, strictly speaking, not correct – one circle is not "rounder" than another – but the linguistic practice of great authors sanctions such a usage.[30] The way Valla phrases this distinction – "the most demanding and Stoical law of truth" (*exactissima veritatis lex ac stoica*) versus "popular custom" (*consuetudo popularis*), and "the nature and truth of the thing" (*natura et veritas rei*) versus "spoken usage" (*usus loquendi*) – seems to imply that he admits that the popular or ordinary usage does not always adequately reflect the nature and truth of a state of affairs.[31] For Valla, however, the common way of speaking has primacy over a possibly more correct way of describing things: "it is one thing to speak according to the very standard of truth, it is another thing to speak according to popular custom, common to virtually the whole human race."[32] Truth and custom, in other words, are not always identical.[33] This distinction is derived from the age-old debate, noted above, between the grammarians on the one hand and the orators on the other hand, for whom speaking refined Latin is more important than speaking it in accordance with a rigid set of grammatical rules. But Valla broadens the distinction and hence the concept of truth so as to include other types of instances where one phrase matches the facts better than another. It is not only limited to the contrast between grammatically true versus approved linguistic custom, but also applies to speaking in accordance with the way a thing or state of affairs is versus approved linguistic custom. What we see here is that the *Repastinatio*, rather than being the theoretical foundation of the *Elegantiae*, as is often maintained, reveals how the grammatical approach works in practice, though it should not be forgotten that Valla's critique is frequently founded on nonlinguistic grounds as well: in their theoretical speculations philosophers often go beyond sense perception and imagination, conceiving lines without width, points without a certain quantity, matter without form, quality without a substance, and speculating about natural



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phenomena which are out of reach of human sense perception – a practice Valla repudiates.[34]

After having criticized Aristotelian–scholastic metaphysics, ethics, and natural philosophy in Book I of the *Repastinatio*,[35] Valla turns to dialectic in Books II and III, treating, for instance, propositions and their *signa* or signs (indicators of quality and quantity such as *omnis*, *aliquis*, and *non*, what scholastics would call syncategorematic terms), the square of opposition, proof and argument, and various forms of argumentation. These themes were standard topics in the Aristotelian tradition, but Valla believes that the logical approach of the *natio peripatetica* is of little value for the orator, whose habitat is the public domain where opinions and beliefs are exchanged, convictions expressed, cases made and disagreements voiced. For him, language is primarily a vehicle for communication, debate, and persuasion, and consequently arguments are to be evaluated in terms of their usefulness, effectiveness, and persuasiveness rather than in terms of formal validity. Of course, it is useful to study Aristotelian syllogisms and issues such as (formal) validity and truth conditions, but one should not take the part for the whole. Dialectic, Valla argues, is merely a species of confirmation or refutation, and as such merely a part of one of the five parts of rhetoric, invention.[36] Compared to rhetoric, dialectic is an easy subject, which requires little time to master, since it considers and uses the syllogism only *in abstracto*; its sole aim is to teach. The orator, on the other hand, uses not only syllogisms, but also the enthymeme (incomplete syllogism), the epicheireme (a kind of extended reasoning) and example, and he has to clothe everything in persuasive arguments, since his task is not only to teach but also to please and to move. Thus Valla rhetoricizes dialectic by subsuming the study of one type of argument, the Aristotelian syllogism, under a much broader range of forms of argumentation, approaching them from an oratorical point of view. His guide is Quintilian, according to whom the whole point of argumentation is to prove what is not certain by means of what is certain.[37] As certainties Quintilian lists sense perceptions, things about which there is general agreement and things which are established by law or have passed into current usage. On the basis of these certainties we may render doubtful things credible or probable. Quintilian elaborates on this notion of credibility by distinguishing three degrees: "the strongest" (*firmissimum*), "because almost always true"; "the highly likely" (*velut propensius*) and "the merely compatible" (*tantum non repugnans*). Following this account, Valla distinguishes syllogisms with certain and true premises, leading to certain conclusions, from those syllogisms with premises which are not so certain, that is, half true and half certain (*semivera ac semicerta*, with a conclusion which is *seminecessaria*).[38] For instance: a



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mother loves her son; Orestes is Clytemnestra's son. Therefore, it is probable or credible, or at least possible, that Clytemnestra loves Orestes – a likely though not certain proposition, for it is not necessarily the case that a mother loves her son. Having divided kinds of proof into necessary and credible ones, Valla writes that "all proof arises through true things which are certain, and through these things truth itself makes some other thing which was previously uncertain appear certain, and it does this either necessarily or plausibly."[39] This view is basically the same as Quintilian's. Valla is quite explicit about his indebtedness to Quintilian: he is happy to give a long quotation from the *Institutio oratoria* (5.10.23), amounting to thirty pages in the modern edition of the *Repastinatio*, because Valla, as he himself concedes, has nothing new to say on forms of argumentation such as the enthymeme, induction and deduction, and the topics based on things and persons.

Widening the scope of arguments beyond the strictly formal, valid ones, Valla also discusses captious forms of reasoning such as the sorites,[40] paradoxes, and dilemmas. Some modern scholars have interpreted this interest as proof of Valla's endorsement of ancient skepticism, since these types of argument seem to undermine the possibility of certainty in knowledge and teach us to be content with verisimilitude and probability.[41] Valla, however, can hardly be called a skeptic. Apart from the lack of textual evidence that Valla endorsed the skeptical position of doubt and the impossibility of knowledge and certainty, his treatment of captious forms of reasoning such as the sorites and the dilemma reveals a critical and suspicious attitude rather than gleeful acceptance. In bringing about *aporia* and the suspense of judgment these rhetorical techniques are indeed grist for the skeptic's mill, but Valla, interestingly, considers these and similar arguments to be sophistical and fallacious. Their force is easily broken if we examine the case carefully, paying attention to its wider circumstances and its chronological course and taking notice of the normal meaning of words. Such an approach will dispel their air of insolubility. The dream paradox, for instance, in which a dream tells the dreamer not to believe dreams is characterized as a dream which asserts something which defies proper verification. Valla is particularly interested in what the Greeks call *antistrephon* and Cicero *conversio*, that is, the maneuver, taught mainly by rhetoricians, by which a dilemmatic argument can be countered by another one.[42] Valla extensively discusses the famous dilemma reported by Aulus Gellius (*Attic Nights* v.10.5–16) about a lawsuit between Protagoras and his pupil Euathlus. The pupil has promised to pay the second installment of the fees after having won his first case. However, he refuses to pay, and Protagoras brings him to court. If Euathlus loses the case, he will have to pay the rest of the fee because of



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the judges' verdict; if he wins, he will have to pay as well, but now on account of his agreement with Protagoras. Euathlus, however, converts the argument: in either case he will not have to pay. Aulus Gellius thought that the judges should have refrained from passing judgment because any decision would be inconsistent with itself. But Valla rejects such a rebuttal of dilemmatic arguments and thinks that an answer may be formulated in response to such a dilemma, imagining himself making a speech on Protagoras' behalf. So while not denying that these arguments may deceptively appear to be convincing in creating an aporetic situation, he considers this kind of argument "cunning, amusing and witty rather than sincere and valid," finding corroboration in Quintilian's silence about it.[43] Nevertheless, it is worth noticing that Valla seems to be one of the first in the Latin West who dealt with types of dilemmatic arguments.

Valla's appeal to the broader context of an argument in order to evaluate its effectiveness returns in a different form in some of his other works. Thus, in his dialogue on the highest good, *De vero bono*, he considers the fable of Gyges, in which Gyges' ring enabled him to become invisible and to do wicked things. Valla rejects it on account of its internal inconsistency and the implausibility of the chronological order of events: "the fable does not square with itself and lacks coherence" (*fictio non quadrat nec sibi constat*).[44] The same appeal to internal consistency also informs Valla's famous demonstration that the Donation of Constantine, the medieval document used by the papacy to claim political power within the Roman Empire, is a forgery. Valla not only marshals linguistic arguments of various kinds but also points to the psychological impossibility of the whole case: for example, in donating a large part of his imperial domains to Pope Sylvester, the Emperor Constantine would behave in a way different from that presented in the document. And how could he hide such an act from his relatives and friends? "But if, having been such a man as he was, he had been transformed as it were into another man, there would certainly not have been lacking those who would warn him, most of all his sons, his relatives, and his friends."[45] The whole case goes against the logic of events and the logic of Constantine's known behavior patterns.

Inspired by the ideal of the orator as sketched by Cicero and Quintilian, Valla seeks to broaden considerably the range of parameters for assessing the power of arguments. His approach to meaning and argumentation therefore may be called "holistic" as it points to the entire context in which arguments function and hence ought to be evaluated – a context which is considerably wider than the single-sentence examples of the scholastics. It is also distinctively practical in that it takes as its point of departure real language rather than the semi-formalized dialect of the scholastics. It is



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therefore understandable that his programme of a dialectic based on real language and exemplified by his own analysis of words and arguments in the *Elegantiae* and *Repastinatio* is often called a transformation or a reform of the late medieval Aristotelian–scholastic dialectic. But since his aims and methods differed so vastly from those of professional logicians, it may be better to speak of a reorientation or alternative to scholastic dialectic – an alternative which in the hands of the northern humanist Rudolph Agricola (1444–85) became a powerful tool to read, analyze, and compose argumentative texts designed to teach and convince.

## Rudolph Agricola

Agricola may be said to have completed what Valla initiated: the writing of a dialectical manual based on real language. His *De inventione dialectica*, completed in 1479 but first printed only in 1515, became a best-seller in the sixteenth century with forty-four editions of the text and thirty-two editions of epitomes within sixty years.[46] This is in striking contrast with the limited circulation of Valla's work on dialectic, which would have been unsuitable for teaching in any case. But what Valla did for grammar in his *Elegantiae*, which did enjoy immense popularity, Agricola did for the study of dialectic, inaugurating a new tradition of textbooks in rhetoric and dialectic and influencing illustrious humanists such as Erasmus, Latomus, Vives, Melanchthon, and Ramus.

The link with Valla seems obvious: both humanists reject a formal approach to language and argumentation and aim at a dialectic using real language. The differences, however, far outweigh the similarities.[47] Apart from different positions on a number of points, the scope and strategy of Agricola's work are different. His aim is not to demolish the Aristotelian metaphysical edifice – he seems, for instance, to accept the basic structure of the categories – nor does he seem to endorse Valla's ideal of orator. Far from downplaying (as Valla did) the role of dialectic as an easy and almost puerile activity, defined as a mere part of invention and hence of rhetoric, Agricola makes dialectic the core of the linguistic arts, allotting to rhetoric the modest task of decoration and to grammar the care of correct usage.

Agricola's work is devoted to the finding (*inventio*) rather than the judging of arguments (*iudicium*) – a distinction which goes back to antiquity.[48] He assigns to dialectic the fundamental task of teaching, that is, speaking convincingly (*probabiliter*) on all subjects, for this is how he defines it. Basing himself on Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian, and Boethius, but moving beyond these authorities, Agricola systematically explores the whole range of issues involved in speaking convincingly. Whenever we want to be persuasive



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we must consider in advance which arguments we must establish in order to prove our point, how to structure and order them, what type of discourse is fitting in a particular case, how to present our case in words, and how to take into account our audience or readers. These and many other issues are dealt with in a systematic way, and illustrated by examples culled from the great authors. Thus, Agricola offers a guide not only to thinking about effective and convincing argumentation or, more generally, communication, but also to reading and analyzing the classical texts.[49] Orations of Cicero for instance (but also Virgil's *Aeneid*) present excellent examples of argumentative structures, often present just below the surface level of rhetorical fireworks, and the reader is shown, in a number of close readings, how to distill the main and subsidiary questions and how to lay bare the dialectic infrastructure of arguments of various kinds.

Thus everything hinges on the invention of good arguments: that is, what creates conviction in doubtful matters. The principal part of Agricola's work is therefore devoted to the finding of arguments through the *loci* (places, topics, seats of arguments): that is, headings from which arguments can be drawn. Thus the topic "cause" applied to the theme of "war" should trigger thoughts, concepts, and words about the causes of war which may be developed into kinds of arguments in a given situation: "by the prompting of the topics, as if by certain signs, we are enabled to turn our minds around the things themselves and perceive whatever in each of them is convincing and suitable for what our speech sets out to teach."[50] Such lists of topics had a long and complicated history.[51] Agricola drew in particular on those of Cicero, Quintilian and Boethius in establishing his own systematic and well-reasoned list, which includes definition, genus, species, property, whole, parts, action, efficient cause, final cause, effects, place, time, comparison, similars, and opposites. These "places where the arguments are found" (as Cicero famously described them) offer a heuristic tool in registering all kinds of aspects of one's subject:[52]

> every thing has a certain substance of its own, certain causes it arises from, certain effects it produces ... As if following these things, when we alert our mind to consider any given subject, at once we shall go through the whole nature of the thing and its parts, and through all the things which are consistent or incompatible with it, and we shall draw from there an argument apposite to the subject proposed. These common headings, just as they contain within themselves everything that can be said about any subject, so also they contain all the arguments.

In applying the *loci* universally to all kinds of argumentative discourse, Agricola rejects Boethius' formal approach to the topics. Boethius had



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stressed the difference between rhetoric and dialectic, each with its own system of topics. In his account the topics were treated as the foundations, that is, the premises of a dialectical syllogism, from which it derives its firmness and validity. This formal approach differs from Cicero's. In his *Topica* he presented one system of topical invention for all the arts, and it is to this more flexible, pragmatic use of the topics that Agricola returns. As he writes, the topics help the scientist no less than the teacher and debater in providing general principles of argumentation and organizing one's discourse.[53] Even though Agricola assigns a seemingly modest role to rhetoric as the art of decoration, the overall effect of his program is a rhetoricization of dialectic by uniting rhetorical and dialectical invention into one universal system, which could be extended to inquiries in all branches of knowledge. In his hands it has become a logic of inquiry rather than, as it had been for Boethius and his medieval followers, a logic of disputation in which the topics as universal propositions guarantee the validity of assertions made in disputation and argument.

Agricola's approach was taken up and developed in various directions by later humanists, depending on their wider aims and interests. An important name here is Melanchthon, one of Luther's closest associates, who reformed educational practices in Germany by writing a series of textbooks in the Agricolan vein on dialectic and rhetoric.[54] In all his writings the close connection between dialectic and rhetoric is stressed: dialectic tells us how to find, structure and present arguments for making a case. Rhetoric makes use of much the same tools as dialectic, and in Melanchthon's case this means especially the topics and their rhetorical pendant, the *loci communes*: that is, general notions belonging to a particular field of inquiry, which are not the reader's own invention but reflect the deep structure of nature.[55] This dialectical apparatus is developed at great length, incorporating terms and concepts from the traditional syllabus, based on Aristotle's *Organon*, but its aim remains distinctively practical and pedagogical: it aids the student in reading and analyzing classical texts and the Bible, in laying bare the argumentative armature by running through a set of basic questions and headings. And it also aided in composing one's own works. Thus, in readdressing the balance of dialectic towards real language and the arguments deployed in order to communicate and obtain conviction, humanism opened up new ways of reading and composing texts, built partly on the precepts of ancient dialectic and rhetoric, partly on their own imaginative and creative interpretations of these old texts. This move towards a new hermeneutics, a new approach to texts, arguments, and meaning is perhaps the most significant contribution of humanism.



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## NOTES

1. See Ashworth 1985; Nuchelmans 1980 and 1983. Another approach should also be mentioned. In the magical tradition, which became especially popular after the rediscovery of Plato's *Cratylus* and the rise of Hermeticism and natural magic, the divine origin of words was stressed. Words were believed to reveal the inner natures or essences of things, and biblical support for this view was found in the story of Adam's giving all creatures their names. On these traditions see e.g. Klein 1992.
2. For Hobbes see Leijenhorst 2002; for Locke see Ashworth 1981 and 1984; for Descartes see, for example, Ariew 1999, Rozemond 1998; for the entire period see Garber and Ayers 1998. On the dominance of the Aristotelian paradigm (according to which spoken and written words derive their meaning from mental concepts) during the Renaissance see Demonet 1992; for a different perspective see Moss 2003.
3. For excellent discussion covering the entire period see e.g. Vasoli 1968, Wels 2000 and Moss 2003.
4. Kneale and Kneale 1962, 298–316; Risse 1964; C. S. Lewis quoted by Perreiah 1982, 20. See Jardine 1988a, 173–4.
5. See e.g. Harris 1980 and 1981 for a critique of modern "scientific" approaches to language.
6. Cf. Ax 2001.
7. Valla 1984, 214 and 216.
8. Valla 1982, 217. Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 1.6.27; see Camporeale 1972, 181–2; Marsh 1979; Giannini 1996.
9. Latin text in Garin 1952, 598; cf. Moss 2003, 36–7.
10. Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 1.6.3; Cicero, *De oratore* II.38.159; see Marsh 1979, 105.
11. Baxandall 1971, 118; see the literary appropriation of Valla's name in J. M. Coetzee's novel *Elizabeth Costello*, 2003, 128–30.
12. From the *Oratio in principio studii*, delivered at Rome in 1455; edited in Rizzo 1994; translation in Baxandall 1971, 119.
13. Cf. Regoliosi 1995, esp. 154–7; Nauta 2004, esp. 108–12.
14. Text in Garin 1952, 596; see Nauta 2006b.
15. On this tradition see Jensen 1996 and Moss 2003, 43–63.
16. Text in Garin 1952, 610; Valla 1982, 5:7–8, 145:7, 278:1 and elsewhere.
17. What follows is based on Nauta 2003a and Nauta forthcoming 1. For the Latin text of the three versions see Zippel's edition (Valla 1982). For other discussions see esp. Vasoli 1968; Mack 1993; Laffranchi 1999.
18. Valla 1982, 14.
19. Ibid., 30–6.
20. Ibid., 21–30; see Nauta 2003a, esp. 619–25.
21. Valla 1982, 443:17.
22. Ibid., 112–13 and 135–56.
23. For references see Nauta 2003a, 613–15; the next two paragraphs are based on this article.
24. Ockham 1974, 167–8.



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25. E.g. Ockham 1974, 167–8; Ockham, 1978, 158–9. See Moody 1935, 132 and 172–3.
26. Valla 1982, 363:24 and 15:28. An extensive analysis of these and other passages will be found in Nauta forthcoming 1, chs. 1–3.
27. See Nauta 2004 and Nauta forthcoming 1, chs. 1–3.
28. Valla 1982, 365:9.
29. Valla 1982, 420:3; 117:3 and 118:15. This should qualify some modern statements to the effect that in Valla's view there are no things without names (see Camporeale 1986, 227).
30. Valla 1982, 435:23–4; 162:11; 387:3.
31. Valla 1982, 386:26–8; 387:3; 160:8–15; 162:11–13; see 221:19.
32. Valla 1982, 386:26–8. See Camporeale 1972, 180 and 205, n. 9, and Tavoni 1984, 144–5, who concludes that *consuetudo* for Valla means what the *periti*, the orators and learned, say: that is, the literary practice of the best authors, rather than ordinary people's parlance. The latter is even at times repudiated by Valla (145, n. 49; see Tavoni 1986, 212–13). This is true, yet Valla clearly speaks of "almost the entire human race" here. For an analysis, see Nauta forthcoming 1, Conclusion.
33. See his statement "to give truth and custom each their due" (Valla 1982, 46:8) and his hesitation between "essence" and "substance"; the latter is more common, but the former may bring us closer to the truth (46:2–16).
34. Nauta 2004.
35. On Valla's critique of the Aristotelian conception of the soul, see Nauta 2003b, and Nauta forthcoming 1, ch. 4; on his ethics see ibid., ch. 5 and Nauta forthcoming 2.
36. Valla 1982, 175–6.
37. *Institutio oratoria* 5.10.8.
38. Valla 1982, 239–41. See Mack 1993, 80–4, and Nauta forthcoming 1, chs. 7–8.
39. Valla 1982, 243; I use Mack's translation in Mack 1993, 82.
40. The so-called "heap argument": if 100 grains constitute a heap, 99 certainly also constitute a heap. But if we go on subtracting grains, we may arrive at the conclusion that just one grain constitutes a heap. The argument discredits ideas of limit.
41. Jardine 1983; see Panizza 1978 on Academic skepticism in Valla's *De vero bono*.
42. Valla 1982, 306–28. See esp. Nuchelmans 1991a, 88–94; Nuchelmans 1991b; Mack 1993, 90–2, 98–100, 105–8, Monfasani 1990; Nauta 2006a. Valla does not seem to have any principal problem with dilemma itself but only with the rhetoricians' technique of the "conversion" of a dilemma (Valla 1982, 332, line 11).
43. Valla 1982, 333–4 and 322.
44. Valla 1977, 188–9. See Langer 2002.
45. Valla 1976; tr. Coleman in Valla 1993, 37. See Nauta 2004, 106–8.
46. See Mack 1993, ch. 13.
47. Monfasani 1990, Mack 1993, 244–50 (with a full list of differences on 248–9). See Vasoli 1968, 147–82.
48. E.g. Agricola 1992, 12–20 and 196–206 (1.2 and 2.1).
49. Mack 1985, Mack 1993, Meerhoff 1990.
50. Agricola 1992, 10; tr. Mack 1993, 139.



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51. See Cogan 1984 on the topical systems of Cicero, Boethius, and Agricola, and their differences.
52. Agricola 1992, 18–20, tr. in Mack 1993, 140.
53. Agricola 1992, chapters 2.7, 2.28, and at various other places.
54. Vasoli 1968, Meerhoff 1994a and 1994b; Moss 2003, esp. 153–69 and 247–50; Wels 2000.
55. Melanchthon speaks of "forms or rules of all things" (*formae seu regulae omnium rerum*); see Moss 2003, 160, n. 5.



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# 11

PAUL RICHARD BLUM

# The immortality of the soul

## The scope of the immortality debate in the Renaissance

The debate during the Renaissance over the immortality of the soul encompassed epistemology, metaphysics, and theology. The metaphysical question was whether there is something spiritual that gives life to human beings, such that they are endowed with an ontological status superior to animals and a lasting reality. If this is true, then there is a human soul that transcends the perishable body. But a problem arises: what is the evidence for this, and what does it mean for man to be essentially spiritual? If one were to deny the need for any ontological difference between beasts and men – and that would entail abolishing the principle of life or soul as something distinct from body – then the fact of consciousness and truth over and beyond particular beings demands explanation.

Hence an epistemological problem arises from the metaphysical one. For the mere possibility that animation and spirit might be illusions or misconceptions of life and thought raises a question of epistemology. This, however, is not to be pursued in terms of formal logic, but by way of reflection upon the working of the human mind inasmuch as it seems to be the "place" (or subject) where claims are proffered that transcend particulars and where reflexivity seems to reside. The question is, then, whether the "place" of truth is coextensive with truth itself, and – supposing truth has an ontological status beyond that of physical things – whether the mind or intellect as this "place" shares that ontological status. That is to say: is the intellect as eternal as the truths it is supposed to and tries to think?

The theological issues are implied in the metaphysical ones: if God is the ultimate subject and holder of truth and by definition spiritual, then human understanding, insofar as it attains truth, is inherently theological. What needs to be clarified is whether human spirituality, or mind, or intellect, or soul, is something divine or a derivative of the divine, assuming the divine admits of degrees. And even if any essential distance between body and



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spiritual qualities is denied, still, the ontological properties of truth (as eternal, trans-subjective, communicable, etc.) need to be established. This is best done with explicit reference to that being who overrides error and the ephemeral, namely God. As for the spiritual and intellectual nature of man, granted there is evidence for it, the question arises, how to reconcile man's undeniable fallibility and frailty with it? How can a human being account for error, both intellectual and moral? Hence the inquiry turns to moral theology and asks how man can actually be held accountable for his failures of judgment. From a theological and ethical point of view, the answer is that there must be a way to hold man accountable for his (intellect-driven) actions because otherwise there would be no way to tell good from bad, which would have consequences in practical life. Even if the spiritual essence of man is questioned, the elementary principles of morality must be thought of as somehow 'hard-wired' in the human mind. This is the theoretical framework within which Renaissance and early modern thinkers addressed the question of the immortality of the soul, and why it was important to them.

The topic of the immortality of the soul was inherited from medieval scholasticism, where it was embedded in the dualism of corporeal mortality and the salvation of the individual soul, as it appears for instance in the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard (d. 1160), the most important theological textbook of the schools.[1] It gained momentum as a controversial issue owing to the reception of Averroes' commentaries on Aristotle's *De anima*,[2] and during the high scholastic period it developed into a touchstone for Christian teaching because the Averroist approach appeared to deny personal immortality as well as individual salvation and responsibility for human actions. The solutions to the problem, as outlined in Thomas Aquinas' treatise *On the Unity of Intellect* (1270), were (1) to give a thorough interpretation of Aristotle's text and (2) to analyze the structure of the soul from a theoretical point of view, in order to establish in which epistemological and ontological sense the soul of an individual might be immortal. From then on, the theoretical analysis of psychological questions was interwoven with the hermeneutical question of how best to interpret Aristotle. Text-centered approaches improved thanks to humanist philological research into language and sources,[3] whereas the theoretical approach led to scrutinizing the functions of the soul, especially the functions of the intellect and its role in cognition. The immortality of the soul continued to be discussed long after the Renaissance. However, once the issue of Aristotle's compatibility with theological doctrine lost its importance, the discussions divided into a merely theological problem, to be dealt with according to the standards of rival theologies, and an epistemological problem, wherein the immortality debate amounted to a debate about the trans-personal validity of cognition.



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In giving an account of this debate in its Renaissance phase it is reasonable to omit the scholastic discussions of the problem from the fourteenth and early fifteenth century, given that, as far as the question of immortality is concerned, these discussions were largely confined to the schools and did not have the public resonance of the debates that emerged in the context of the humanist movement.[4] Their relative lack of notoriety is illustrated by the case of Biagio Pelacani da Parma (d. 1416) who defended the option that the intellect is inseparable from the body and hence ceases to exist with it. His argument was that any human cognition depends on matter, and hence any separation of the intellective soul is in itself unknown and beyond experience; to believe in immortality is therefore a question of hope and authority.[5] Yet Biagio featured in Giovanni Gherardo da Prato's literary dialogue *Il paradiso degli Alberti*, where he was praised by the humanist interlocutor Coluccio Salutati (d. 1406) as a champion of the concord of faith and philosophy, one of the major concerns of the early humanists. Man's immortality was a topic in the humanist "dignity of man" rhetoric, and within this context, it would appear, Biagio's arguments, if they were known at all, were not seen as controversial.[6] It is thus historically more consistent to start from the point where the immortality controversy became a part of a broader cultural conflict.

## From the Council of Florence to Ficino

The real beginning of the immortality debate in the Renaissance came with the Council of Florence in 1439. It was there that the Byzantine philosopher Georgius Gemistus, called Pletho (d. 1452), launched an attack on Latin Aristotelianism by accusing Aristotle, among others, of inconsistency by teaching in his book *On the Soul* that the human mind is eternal, but not endorsing that same doctrine in his *Ethics*. According to Pletho this ambiguity had prompted his ancient Greek commentator, Alexander of Aphrodisias, to maintain that according to Aristotle the human soul is mortal.[7] Pletho himself seems to have taught a version of metempsychosis, i.e. transmigration of souls from one body to another in fixed cycles, governed by fate and the world soul.[8] In doing so, Pletho combined textual criticism with moral appeal. His appearance in Florence is supposed to have prompted Cosimo de' Medici to charge Marsilio Ficino (1433–99) with the task of making Platonic and Neoplatonic sources available to the learned public.[9] The major result of Ficino's endeavors was his enormous treatise, *Platonic Theology, On the Immortality of Souls*, which rehashed the entire question in terms of Aristotelian and Neoplatonic methods and directly addressed Epicureanism and Averroism as the ultimate enemies of true Christian thought.[10]



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In its eighteen books, Ficino's *Platonic Theology* lays the groundwork first by outlining scholastic concepts of body, soul, spirit, movement, individuals. Then it proposes a philosophical theology according to which God is endowed with the traditional attributes of unity and infinity, as well as all super-eminent qualities of power, eternity, will, freedom, and providence.[11] In a theory of hypostases peculiar to Ficino, though partly indebted to Proclus,[12] the soul takes a central place, thus mediating between the higher and lower realms and integrating them (Book 3). This cosmological setting of the theory of the soul is completed by differentiating soul into a world soul, the souls of the celestial spheres, and animal souls. Book 5 harvests the previous definitions by proving the immortality of the soul through its ontological status, namely its attributes as self-moving, substantial, divine, immaterial, life-giving, etc. Conversely, Books 6 and 7 delimit the deficient ontological status of the body and the role of the soul in dominating it. At this point Ficino is ready to describe the operation of the intellect (Book 8), which entails that detachment from the body is the internal aim of the soul. Consequently, the Epicurean theory of the soul's mortality, particularly that of Lucretius, is thoroughly refuted (Books 10–11). The following three books are devoted to showing that the human soul by its own nature strives toward union with God, being infused with divine power and in and of itself directed toward what transcends it. What follows is a critique of Averroism in Book 15 and a Platonic explanation of the conjunction of soul and body, including its weakening effect on the soul (Book 16). After some cautionary qualifications concerning the Platonic doctrine of the transmigration of souls (Book 17), Ficino concludes his treatise with a decidedly Christian interpretation of the origin and afterlife of the human soul in Book 18.

In describing the operation of the human intellect Ficino draws upon the standard hierarchy of abstraction from sense perception via representation to intelligence, but he divides the operation that retains the sense perception into "imagination" and "phantasy."[13] This allows him to keep the operation of data processing, such as recognition and primary judgment ("this is so and so"), on a lower level of mental operation: "particular concepts of the phantasy are called ... the bodiless intentions of bodies."[14] True abstract knowledge ascends "to the divine idea," whereby the universals of Aristotelian terminology are understood as immaterial realities.[15] Ficino's Platonic turn in conceptualizing the process of abstraction leads to the notion that cognition, even that of particulars, is a process of comparing and referring things to the intellect itself, i.e. a reflexive or transcendental intuition of reality based on absolute ideas, with the result that the intellect itself is absolute and uncontaminated by the particulars it cognizes.[16] Concepts have their "place" or "seat" exclusively in the intellect, never in a body.[17] On this basis Ficino



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is able to argue that the intellect, by its very act of operation, is to be defined as incorporeal: "Clearly, then, the intellect is not only incorporeal but immortal too, since it always forms and perfects itself through itself by its own activity, forever understanding and willing."[18] Ficino's method is to appropriate Aristotelian epistemology into a Platonic framework that endows abstract notions with an ontological status of spiritual reality, which he spells out in his work through systems of hierarchies and interrelationships between the various degrees of soul.

Ficino unmistakably followed here the lead of Augustine and Albert the Great, both of whom had vindicated the immortality of the soul by making truth a manifestation of the divine and by giving the human soul the status of an essentially incorporeal derivative of spiritual beings. In his early short treatise, *De immortalitate animae*, Augustine starts with the proposition that the soul must be immortal, because she is that which bears imperishable truth, including laws of mathematics, even if a human person happens to be unconscious of such truth.[19] He defines reason (*ratio*) as "that feature of the soul with which she intuits the truth through herself and not through the body; hence reason is either contemplation of truth, but not through body, or it is truth itself that is contemplated."[20] Consequently, stupidity is not an argument against reason. The immersion of the soul in the body does not affect the soul's life-giving power and immortality. When the body dies it is the living *thing* that dies, not life.[21] This blending of the notions of life, truth, abstraction, self-reference, and eternity is what Ficino elaborated in his own work. Albert the Great also referred to Platonic modes of thought when explaining the intellect as something immaterial. In his commentary on Aristotle's *De anima* he employed a simile from Isaac Israeli's *Book of Definitions*, which described the rational soul as "created in the shadow of intelligence, that is to say, that the intellectual soul as such is the shaded [*obumbrata*] intelligence in as much as it is the soul of a mortal body, because its light of intelligence is shaded by it." In Albert's view this metaphor teaches that all functions of the soul are degrees of intelligence itself, so that the rational soul is "an image of eternity and exists beyond time, as the sensual soul is a shadow [*umbra*] of the rational soul."[22] This imagery allows Albert to present the human soul as an immaterial totality that unites in itself all potencies of intellection and life that "influence" the body. The intellect, then, is both separate and "intermingled" with the body; it is not the intellect that is conjoined with the body but, rather, its power (*virtus*), which is the "image" of the agent intellect.[23] Having established the human soul as a derivative or manifestation of the eternal and incorporeal, Albert's proof of the immortality of the soul is but a corollary.[24]

The same strategy was pursued by Ficino when confronting Averroism and Epicureanism. As he sees it, Averroes' major fault was to deny that "the



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intellect's substance can be the form perfecting body, can be its life-giving act."[25] As might be expected, Ficino replies by invoking the hierarchy of spirits, mentioned above, of which mind is the interface between the spiritual and corporeal worlds.[26] The question to be solved is how this mind can vivify and cognize the material realm. One paradigm used to illustrate how mind penetrates body is the omnipresence of the point in all geometrical dimensions, according to Pythagorean mathematics.[27] In terms of epistemology, phantasy plays an important role. Averroes' emphasis on the separateness of mind from body, as Ficino views it, entails that mind does not cognize anything sensual at all. Ficino's theory of imagination and phantasy promises to explain how the intellect processes sense data without being entangled with the body from which they originate. The human mind is "midway" and of itself inclined towards both the abstract and the corporeal: "if this inclination is via the intellect, then either it begins from bodies and thence straightway transfers itself to things incorporeal, or it arises now and then from things incorporeal and descends in turn to bodies' images."[28] Clearly, this is one of Ficino's favorite theorems, namely the mediating function of the human mind. With regard to the question of the immortality of the soul this approach makes it evident that Ficino – along with many others – read the Averroists' interpretation of Aristotle's theory of the rational soul within the framework of Neoplatonic metaphysics, taken as a cosmology that unifies philosophical theology and epistemology. Ficino acknowledges that Averroes was induced, for metaphysical reasons, to suppose one intellect for all humans, which was his most infamous theorem (if it was truly his at all, and not just a mental experiment or a puzzle[29]); indeed, the Platonist approach seemed to favor it. It should be mentioned that not long before John Argyropoulos had lectured in Florence on the *De anima* and emphasized the concord of Plato and Averroes.[30] Yet, the supposed oneness of the intellect of all men can be refuted quite easily by disconnecting the multiplication of individuals from matter (as was the common Peripatetic teaching). Ficino maintains that in his cosmology spiritual beings may be multiplied into species and individuals, as is the case with angels, so that matter is not required to individuate souls. This individual would intuit the universal as gathered from the particular sensual object.[31] In response to Epicurus' alleged doctrine that there is no form that exceeds matter, Ficino can reverse the argument by saying that matter is but the instrument of God and all lower spirits.[32] The Christian conclusion of the Platonic understanding of immortality naturally flows into a description of the soul's return to God and the Beatific Vision.[33]

Ficino was the one who spread the notion that the philosophical world of his time was divided into two "sects," the Alexandrine and the Averroist



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(referring to Alexander of Aphrodisias and Averroes), both equally a menace to religion.[34] Regarding the immortality of the soul, he summarized the antagonism between the two schools in a paradox:

> Let us thus take the Platonic and Peripatetic truth ... and assemble it into one. Let us accept from Averroes that the receptive intellect is immortal. Let us accept from Alexander [of Aphrodisias] that the receptive intellects are certain powers naturally implanted in our souls, and that numerically there are as many of them as there are souls. Let us conclude that the souls of men are immortal.[35]

One might wonder why, then, Alexander is so rarely mentioned in the *Platonic Theology*. One possible hypothesis is to assume that Ficino saw the materialist implications of Alexander's interpretation of Aristotle more clearly, and more dangerously, expressed in Epicureanism, a constant target of his treatise. In retrospect this would be justified, because up until the seventeenth century materialist atomism was perceived as the real danger to Christianity.[36]

## Nicoletto Vernia and reactions to "Averroism" in Padua

In 1492 the Paduan professor Nicoletto Vernia (1420–99) wrote a treatise on "the plurality of intellects against the false doctrine of Averroes and on the beatitude of the soul," which reflects implicitly Ficino's and explicitly Albert's philosophy.[37] In his scholastic terms, the problem was "whether the intellective soul is the substantial form of human body and whether it can attain felicity in it."[38] At issue was the correct interpretation of Alexander of Aphrodisias, who in his commentaries on Aristotle was supposed to have maintained that the intellect is inseparable from body, and hence mortal. In his survey of various positions Vernia sided with Albert the Great, whom he identified as a Platonist, while at the same time advocating fundamental concordance between Plato and Aristotle: "The approach [*presentia ad*] of the agent intellect to phantasm makes intellection, for this approach instigates the soul to cognize what it already had."[39] If the intellect contains the forms before attaining objects, then the entanglement of the soul with body (Alexander's alleged teaching) is to be understood only on the level of material intellect, i.e. on the level of sensual cognition, where the images enter the mind like scripture on a slate (*tabula rasa*).[40] Vernia felt entitled to correct Alexander's image thanks to a new translation of some of his works by Girolamo Donato that had been recently published.[41] Continuing his reconciliation of Platonic and scholastic doctrines, Vernia pointed out that forms are never universal insofar as they are instantiated in particulars,



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but necessarily universal in the intellect, insofar as it is their seat and, consequently, eternal.[42] He also referred to the hierarchy of souls according to Isaac Israeli and, again following Albert, suggested that the ultimate beatitude is not within the competence of philosophy but rather of "some other science."[43] After having paid his dues as a scholastic professor, Vernia determined the question of the immortality of the soul by recourse to humanist learning: Cicero, Xenophon, Macrobius, Pythagoras were now his authorities to maintain that "from the point of view of natural philosophy [*physice*] we have to state what faith states concerning the intellective soul, especially because it of itself saves the appearances [*secundum ipsam apparentia salvantur*]," namely, that "according to the holy Roman Church and to truth the intellective soul is the substantial form of the human body that gives it being as a form; it is intrinsically created by the sublime God and infused into the human body and in these bodies multiplied as the bodies are, individual in these but not dependent on bodies."[44] The methodical implication of this short treatise is that the immortality of the soul is an issue that cannot be addressed in terms of scholastic epistemology or with the terminology of Aristotelian ontology, but requires a Neoplatonic metaphysics of spiritual being that, incidentally or not, conforms with Christian doctrine; furthermore the issue is best treated in language that appeals to human experience ("the appearances") as the ancient sources of the humanists did.

Prior to this treatise Vernia had adhered to Averroism, like most contemporary Aristotelians at the University of Padua, the most important center of scholastic philosophy in Renaissance Italy. The discussions concerning the doctrine of the unity of intellect for all humans were so charged that Pietro Barozzi, then bishop of Padua, issued a decree in 1489 that prohibited further public discussion of the unity of intellect of any description.[45] A few years later, Antonio Trombetta (1436–1518) published a treatise against the Averroists, much hailed by Barozzi, in which the major arguments were discussed.[46] The sixth Averroist thesis, however, was presented as being in accordance with both Aristotle and the Catholic faith, namely that of the incorruptibility of the soul. Trombetta agreed that, first, the Averroist theory of the one intellect for all mankind made it plausible that cognition of forms is destitute of any material implications (i.e. independent of material potencies?); second, the essence of the intellect is evidently not weakened by weaknesses of the body; moreover, all forms that are not the offspring of matter – including the intellect – are imperishable; and, finally, that kind of cognition that transcends perishable sensual cognition is immaterial.[47] As for the struggle against Averroism, immortality was not the problem, only individuation or multiplication: how an immaterial substance can be localized in something material like a body and thus be proper to each individual



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human being. As had already transpired from Ficino's treatment of the problem, the possibility of individuating an immortal soul hinged upon the eternity of the contents of intellect and intellection. As long as the forms, abstractions, truths, etc. were thought to be atemporal, the timelessness of the human soul seemed guaranteed. But what about the individuation of that very intellect? In answering this problem Trombetta used an interesting distinction. Concepts, he suggested, are twofold: "formal" in the way something is conceived, and "objective," i.e. concepts qua objects; the latter can be conceived as appearing in the *species intelligibilis* which is attained in the act of intellection. In this subtle distinction the former meaning of concept refers to the act of cognition, and there are as many cognitions as there are individual intellects. The latter meaning of concept recuperates the eternity of the concept (object) cognized and its transcendent unity that is valid in all acts of intellection.[48] Thus the atemporality of intellect and the individuality of intellection may go together and do not endanger the immortality of the individual soul. Trombetta's arguments show how the debate about the immortality of the human soul revealed the interconnectedness between the epistemological and the ontological understandings of 'concept'.

Barozzi's attempt to quell the immortality debate was reinforced by the bull *Apostolici regiminis* at the Fifth Lateran Council, 1513: now it was forbidden outright to advocate either the Alexandrist or the Averroist position, and it was authoritatively declared that the soul is the essential form of the body, immortal, and necessarily multiplied by the number of bodies in which it is infused. Even more, it was ordained that not only theologians, but each and every philosopher in universities and other public fora had to prove as much as possible the truth of Christian religion in this matter.[49] Yet the most famous treatise challenging Christian orthodoxy was still to come.

## Pietro Pomponazzi and the challenge to Christian orthodoxy

In 1516 Pietro Pomponazzi (1462–1525) published his *Treatise on the Immortality of the Soul*.[50] A student of Vernia, he taught philosophy in Padua, Ferrara, and Bologna. His treatise opens with an unmistakable rhetorical device: the entire treatise is presented as a narrative to the Venetian patrician Marcantonio Contarini, in which a former student and Dominican friar is said to have asked the author, while sick, to elaborate on the issue as a sequel to earlier lectures, "leaving aside revelation and miracles, and remaining entirely within natural limits." In spite of his illness Pomponazzi had agreed to explain "what I myself think . . . Yet whether things actually are as I think, you must consult more learned men."[51] Having thus detached his book from standard university lecturing and downplayed his own authority,



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he starts with a Renaissance humanist commonplace: "That man is of a twofold [*anceps*] nature and a mean between mortal and immortal things."[52] The reader may expect from this beginning that Pomponazzi will address the problem in a way akin to Ficino's defense of immortality. Pomponazzi, too, refers to the operations of the sensitive and the vegetative souls, which occur within the body and hence are mortal, whereas the intellective soul seems to work without the body and is hence immortal. Consequently – and this is presented as the main conclusion from the outset – man is "neither unqualifiedly [*simpliciter*] mortal nor unqualifiedly immortal but embraces both natures."[53] How this ambivalence may be realized and theoretically justified is the topic of the following chapters. The first option is that of Averroes: every man has an individual mortal and a common immortal soul (chapters 3 and 4). The second option severs the sensitive soul from intellect in such a way that the intellective soul operates like a moving force on a movable thing (or like "oxen and a plow"). This is inconvenient, since it would ascribe two substantial forms (i.e. souls) to the individual man.[54] The third option introduces the scholastic distinction of *simpliciter* and *secundum quid*: the mortal and the immortal soul are the same in man, yet it is an essence that is unqualifiedly (*simpliciter*) immortal, while in a certain respect (*secundum quid*) mortal (chapter 7). This theory is ascribed to Thomas Aquinas[55] and entails five propositions: (1) the intellective and sensitive powers are the same thing; (2) the soul is of itself immortal, but in some sense mortal; (3) this soul is the form, or essence, of man, not just an external moving force; (4) there are as many souls as there are individuals; (5) soul is introduced into the body by God through creation and not through generation (from the body), but nevertheless continues to exist perpetually.[56]

Pomponazzi's own theory is presented in chapter 9 as a reversal of these five theses, except for the first, namely the factual identity of sensitive and intellectual power in one soul. In order to prove that the soul is of itself mortal, and only relatively immortal, the author has to deal with the theory of abstraction. As was evident in Ficino, sense perception deals with material objects but in a way that deprives the images of their materiality, a first step in arguing for the immateriality of the soul. In Pomponazzi's shift of perspective one has to distinguish between subject (i.e. what underlies operation) and object (what is acted upon or produced). Sense perception, of course, works with the bodily organs as the subject and the images abstracted from matter as its object. At the other extreme, pure intelligences, i.e. immaterial spiritual beings, lack corporeal subjects that move them, and the object of their knowledge is absolutely immaterial. Between these two there is an intermediate power, the human intellect, which is free of body as subject but relies upon body as its object (i.e. it relies on corporeal experience as its object).



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Thus the human soul is "halfway between things abstract and things not abstract."[57] Again, Pomponazzi employs a trope common to Renaissance Platonic and humanist speculation regarding human dignity: man or his soul as the mediator between the material and spiritual worlds. But Pomponazzi connects the human intellect not with the pure intelligences, as Albert, Ficino, and others did, but with the material world, emphasizing in his way the unity of the intellective and sensitive powers of the soul, so strongly defended by Aquinas. For Pomponazzi the popular metaphor of shade or shadow for human intellection consequently serves to tie the intellect to the material world, instead of opening it to the world of spirits.[58]

Following Aristotle's doctrine that the human intellect never cognizes without some phantasm,[59] now it is said that, even though human intellect is not in the body "in a quantitative and corporeal manner," it still is conjoined to it insofar as it operates with sense data. Therefore, the human intellect operates immaterially when it reflects upon itself, but it happens to depend on the senses and can never be totally separated from matter and quantity. For it can understand universals not absolutely, but only in particular things. Abstractive cognition always processes a bodily image (*idolum*).[60] Even more, the human intellect does not know itself immediately but only as a result of a synthetic discourse which is bound to space and time.[61] This reasoning was consistent with Pomponazzi's university lectures. Although he seems to have embraced the Averroist position as a teacher, he entertained the explanation that the intellect does not have to be immaterial just because it operates by way of abstraction.[62] If the soul as a whole is the essence of man, the cognitive faculty is nothing but its highest degree (*gradus*), which "rises above matter in thinking abstractly and universally, and in this sense the intellect is immaterial and abstract."[63]

Two traditional problems had to be addressed by Pomponazzi: the ontological status of an abstract notion (*species intelligibilis*) and the relationship between *intellectus agens* and *intellectus possibilis*: if the human intellect cognizes universals only in close connection with concrete particulars, it cannot make any statement as to the transcendence of such a universal. Consequently the *species intelligibilis* remains dependent on the mind that actually thinks. Here he relied upon Nominalists, who understood concepts as derivative intentions naturally produced by the mind, and on John Duns Scotus.[64] Contrary to both Neoplatonic and Thomist interpretations, cognition of universals was not a gateway to immaterial, mind-independent realities and thus to immortality. In these traditions the *intellectus agens* was that part of the soul that harbored universals and as such was immortal. According to Themistius, Thomas Aquinas, and others the *intellectus agens* was, indeed, the substantial form of man that guaranteed immortality,



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whereas the *intellectus possibilis* was the interface that provided the mind with phantasms and sense data. Pomponazzi radically severed both intellects from each other. He granted the agent intellect immortality, namely the status of a pure intelligence that acts as an external mover and enables the possible intellect to receive abstract forms, while he decreed the possible intellect to be that form of man that is only in some respect immortal.[65]

After having used strict syllogistic arguments in the first thirteen chapters of his treatise, from chapter 14 on he shifted style and departed, as promised, from the scholastic form of argumentation and answered a series of moral and cosmological objections by referring to a variety of religious and literary sources. He agrees, now, that to participate in the intellect is the aim of humanity in general, but he regards this goal as unrealistic in the case of most men, since to pursue the life of the mind is something supra-human.[66] The existence of immortal spirits seems to be authoritatively documented in literature, philosophy, and Scripture, and there are no grounds for opposing those teachings on which Christianity, Plato, and Avicenna concur.[67] Pomponazzi clearly aimed to serve the expectations of his Renaissance audience, and so did not fail to employ the commonplaces of man the microcosm and the Hermetic formula, "man is a great marvel,"[68] which reinforced the argument that man with his soul is a median between the spiritual and material worlds.

It therefore comes as no surprise when in his final chapter Pomponazzi declared the question of the immortality of the soul to be, in technical terms, as "neutral" (*neutrum problema*) as that of the eternity of the world, i.e. insoluble and irrelevant to religious faith.[69] He emphasized that, according to the requirements of a proper disputation, his treatment was incomplete in advocating only one side, leaving the defense of immortality to others. Such proofs will use revelation and the Bible as premises that are valid (only) in matters of faith. "Wherefore, if any arguments seem to prove the mortality of the soul, they are false and merely seeming, since the first light and the first truth show the opposite. But if any seem to prove its immortality, they are true and clear, but not light and truth," i.e. they are the fruit of human reasoning, which never can reach the unvarying source of truth and light, God.[70]

With this conclusion Pomponazzi technically violated the key motivation of the Lateran Council for prohibiting the teaching of arguments for the mortality of the soul: he endorsed, however ambiguously, the theory of double truth, according to which philosophy and theology come to incompatible conclusions. But he disguised it as a skeptical or fideist move: even if he attacked the Thomist doctrine of immortality without ultimately teaching the mortality of the human soul, deferring the issue instead to God's



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knowledge, he still somehow undermined rational certainty and severed it from faith.

In a lecture of 1521, Pomponazzi explained that both Aristotle and Duns Scotus believe the soul to be mortal, because the term "intellect" is to be understood only metaphorically, whereas true intellect is only the intellect of intelligences who, however, never cognize anything new, as the human intellect does. Nevertheless, Aristotle had talked about the intellect as truly intellect, and to say the soul is mortal is a heresy. To this Pomponazzi has an explanation which connects both observations: "one should not tell everything to the people."[71] This somewhat contorted logic can only be reconciled if we understand that Aristotle in hinting at "true intellect" was supposedly indicating that he had in fact masked his real teaching when arguing for mortality. It was a common notion that in antiquity theological mysteries had to be concealed from the eyes of the vulgar. Consequently, Pomponazzi as a professor could endorse Aristotle's philosophical heresy while sharing his hidden faith in immortality, thus placing him in the chorus of ancient thinkers who secretly embraced pious wisdom. To maintain that this ancient theology coincided with Christian truth had been Ficino's strategy throughout his work, so Pomponazzi might be seen to be aligning himself with the Ficinian project in this one respect.

## Reactions to Pomponazzi: Contarini, Spina, Fiandino, Nifo, Javelli

But despite the strategies Pomponazzi deployed in his *De immortalitate* (e.g. declaring his book as nonacademic, admitting incompleteness, submitting to the authority of the Roman Church), he was inevitably understood as undermining the immortality of the soul. The damage was done. The book was publicly burned in Venice. The Venetian humanist Pietro Bembo, then secretary to Pope Leo X, barely prevented Pomponazzi from being removed from his professorship in Bologna. And a great number of criticisms and responses were published.[72]

The first critique came from Pomponazzi's former student, who had received a copy of the treatise from the master himself: Gaspar Contarini (1483–1535), later a Church diplomat and cardinal and author of a Platonic metaphysics.[73] Before entering into details of the role of the soul, Contarini removed the double truth problem. Some doctrines, he claims, are articles of faith per se, e.g. the Trinity or the resurrection of the dead, while other doctrines – and immortality is one of these – are matters of faith only incidentally (*per accidens*) and may well be proven by reason.[74] He then addressed the ontological status of the soul as a substance that has activity of



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itself.[75] With reference to Plato, Contarini explained that the operation of the soul is self-movement, and that entails immortality, even though some properties of the soul, e.g. its state after death, remain unknown and indemonstrable.[76] The student's last argument against his master refutes Pomponazzi's important claim that the human intellect is only improperly to be called such, i.e. in terms of its participation in intellect. Yes, Contarini replies, reason only participates in intellect; nevertheless it operates as reason, and as such it cannot be just a material form; "although [human] reason is but a shadow of intellect [*intellectus obumbratus*]," reason still belongs to its essence.[77] Again we encounter the Platonizing formula for the degrees of intellect, preferred by Albert and Ficino. It illustrates how Pomponazzi attempted to solve the problem of the soul by emphasizing the epistemological question of how cognition of universals is humanly possible, while the objections to his result necessarily returned to theological and ontological determinations of the status of the soul, which appeal to a Platonic framework that relies on ontological descriptions of spiritual activity. Both arguments are based on the structure of spiritual nature, to be sure: one is focused on the process of cognition, the other on the ontology of intellectual activity.

The same pattern is visible in the most detailed, if not pedantic, attack on Pomponazzi, launched by the Dominican friar Bartolomeo Spina (1478–1546). With respect to the process of abstraction, he argues that there are two meanings of image (*idolum*), the single object of imagination and the universal, or mental, word, which is formed by the intellect. With this he circumvents, instead of answering, Pomponazzi's notion of the intellect as a mean, on which Spina is commenting.[78] Finally, Spina displaced the notion of mediation between spiritual and terrestrial beings from the intellect onto man as a complex of soul and body,[79] thus assigning immortality fully and exclusively to the soul. However, Spina's position was more delicate and became an issue within the Dominican order, because he detected that Thomas de Vio (or Cajetan, 1469–1534) – who until recently had been Superior of the Dominicans and was now a cardinal and the pope's delegate to contain Luther's rebellion in Germany – had "paved the way" for Pomponazzi's errors in his commentary on Aristotle's *De anima*.[80] Cajetan had in fact maintained that if thinking is impossible without imagination, then it is impossible without body, and hence the intellect cannot be separated from body.[81] Like Pomponazzi, he had even gone as far as to maintain that the soul itself is "in part bound to body and in part separate from it," claiming to be following Albert's and Aquinas' meaning, namely, that the intellect is conjoined with body in its being, and only separate insofar as it operates independently of it. This double character makes the intellective soul a



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"reasonable middle [*rationabile medium*]." Its independence consists in its not being a form produced out of matter, while its communality with matter is that it resides in matter. Cajetan adds that the benefit of this kind of intermediate intellect consists in its elevating matter to participation in the lowest of immaterial forms – clearly a conception indebted to Neoplatonic cosmology rather than to Aristotelian epistemology.[82] It seems that Spina had not much to offer against these arguments, except maintaining that the separate and the embodied intellects have different ways of operation.[83]

Among the fiercest defenses of immortality was a book of dialogues by Ambrogio Fiandino (1472–1531), an Augustinian friar who had taught in Bologna and was the auxiliary bishop of Pomponazzi's home town of Mantua. In these dialogues, which despite their dialogic form deploy mostly syllogistic arguments, Pomponazzi figures as "the Sophist." They deserve closer study than they have yet enjoyed, given that the author invokes almost all the leading personalities of Renaissance philosophy, including both Picos, Nicholas of Cusa, Johannes Reuchlin, Erasmus, Bessarion, Argyropoulos, and Pletho.[84]

The former Paduan philosopher and rival of Pomponazzi, Agostino Nifo (1469/70–1538), felt encouraged by Fiandino to add his own contribution to the controversy. Confident in his command of Greek and of the ancient Greek commentators on Aristotle, he addressed the problem whether the intellective soul can have cognition without a phantasm, i.e. independently of material data. First he posits the distinctions that the soul is independent *of* the body but exists *in* the body, and that a power generally is independent of the subject in which it operates.[85] Then he admits that Aristotle taught that the soul as such dies, but that its power of cognition survives as intellect. This split between soul and intellect is pushed further by the assumption that the soul operates as all agree, namely based on sense data, whereas the intellect (when separate) cognizes without phantasms, even though these objects originated in the soul from previous phantasms.[86] In his commentary on *De anima*, Nifo expressly declared that man, and not the human soul, is a mean (as Spina had held) because the intellect is the "form" of the cognitive soul. In other words the rational soul consists of the cognitive faculty that originates from matter, but its form belongs to intellect as such; this amounts to construing a "double soul."[87] Pomponazzi detected at once that Nifo was repeating his own separation between intelligences and the intellective soul, so that he could turn the argument to his favor. He even stressed in his response that such an absolutely independent mind could only be divine.[88] This was a line of thought that would be taken over by Cesare Cremonini (1550–1631), a late Paduan Aristotelian, most famous as an opponent of Galileo.[89] However, Nifo's arguments were successful in that they were



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taken up by the Jesuit Franciscus Toletus (1532–96) and were still being employed in the late eighteenth century by the ex-Jesuit Sigismund Storchenau (1731–97).[90] These arguments were clearly circular, since they presupposed what was in question, namely the separateness of the intellect, a datum which could only be derived from a metaphysics of spiritual substances, but not by way of epistemology. But it was upon epistemology that Pomponazzi's philosophical claim hinged, for according to him cognition of universals through sense data constituted the ultimate dignity of man, whereas the independence of the intellect from matter pertains to faith and lies beyond experience.[91]

In all these treatises allusions to Plato and Platonism tended to indicate more or less conscious waverings between a range of philosophical methods that could be used to isolate the core of the problem. Crisostomo Javelli (1470–1538), again a Dominican friar, expressly coordinated and separated the theological, epistemological, and Platonic ways of philosophizing. First, he was asked by Pomponazzi himself to respond to his philosophical arguments from a theological perspective. Thus Javelli produced a series of counterarguments to Pomponazzi's defense against Nifo, which were printed together with Pomponazzi's *Defensorium* against Nifo. Even though the addition of Javelli's arguments had been required by the inquisitor for printing permission, the fact that Pomponazzi included Contarini's, Javelli's and – implicitly – Nifo's objections in his 1525 collection of treatises may indicate that he seriously wanted his own arguments to be read in the context of the counterarguments against them (as much later Descartes would do with his *Meditations*), so that all sides could be heard.[92] These objections became part of Javelli's book on the "indeficiency" (*indeficientia*) of the soul.[93] With this neologism the author aimed to stress the metaphysical integrity of the soul, which he explores in "four ways, namely according to the philosophy of Aristotle and that of Plato (parts I and II), then according to natural (part III) and Christian religion (III 5)." This third part draws visibly on Ficino's *Platonic Theology*, especially its Book 14, which argues for the naturalness of religion. In his attempt to justify immortality with various methods Javelli factually separated the Aristotelian and the Platonic philosophical discourses from the strictly theological arguments. At the same time he underscored that the ultimate reasons for the integrity of the soul are not of the scholastic-logical, but rather of the Neoplatonic type. Thus in the letter that preceded his responses, published by Pomponazzi, Javelli differentiated Aristotle's philosophy from philosophy as knowledge of truth given as an innate gift of God, an understanding of philosophy characteristic of Platonic thinkers.[94] As to the nature of the Platonic reasons for the immortality of the soul, it should be stressed, Javelli says, that they not only presuppose a cosmology



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of spirit, but also appeal to ethics and explicitly call for "moral cleansing" as a condition for any understanding.[95]

Out of this stage of the discussion there flowed various lines of argument.[96] Almost all treatises on the immortality of the soul emphasized the moral imperative of an afterlife that obliges man to avoid evil. Such is the case with Juan Luis Vives (1492–1540), who terminated his defense of immortality by reconnecting reason (*naturae lumen*) with eternal truth, so that any doubt about immortality appeared unreasonable.[97] And Philipp Melanchthon (1497–1560) brushed the logical arguments aside and focused entirely on exhortation,[98] while bluntly stating that the Christian definition of the soul as an intelligent spirit has no physical arguments for it.[99]

Another position commonly adopted, probably following Javelli, was to assert that Aristotle was not the whole of or the only philosophy. Girolamo Cardano (1501–76) felt entitled to take this line since his own philosophy – as far as the soul was concerned – combined Platonism with Galenism.[100] Simone Porzio, a follower of Pomponazzi who also emphasized the epistemological approach to the cognition of universals, was translated into Italian by Giambattista Gelli, through whom these ideas entered the vernacular dissemination of philosophical ideas in the sixteenth century.[101] On the other hand, Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola (1459–1533) compiled all arguments that discredited Aristotle's authority in psychology,[102] while Agostino Steuco (1497/8–1548) provided posterity with a complete set of Platonic and Hermetic doctrines on the soul and was to become the most quoted source for this brand of philosophy.[103]

## The immortality debate in Hispanic scholasticism and in Descartes

The revival of scholasticism at the end of the sixteenth century harvested all these strains and liberally distributed the Thomist, nominalist, Scotist, and Platonic approaches according to the exigencies of the schools.[104] Benedictus Pererius, SJ (1535–1610), for instance, treated the soul as a subsection of "form," reporting Plato's opinion according to Eusebius of Caesarea, summarizing Aristotle, and then offering sixteen arguments, referring first to the operation of the mind, then citing those that depend on natural theology and those relating to morality. The last argument deals with God's care for mankind and the worship due God in consequence of that care.[105] In most cases scriptural proofs completed the conceptual discussion of the issue.[106]

Francisco Suárez (1548–1617) added to his metaphysical argument that the soul cannot be annihilated because it is not a composite nature, a claim that would have bearing on seventeenth-century discussions: if the soul cannot perish of itself, it nevertheless depends on the free will of the



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Creator. Furthermore, separation from matter does not end its existence, because (as even Cajetan and Pomponazzi agreed) its being does not depend on matter. Hence the soul can only perish if God withdraws his causal agency.[107] However, he added the qualification that his was seemingly an a priori argument (taken from the essence of the soul) which ultimately requires a posteriori proof, because the soul's essence is demonstrable only from its operations as experienced. In support of this contention he refers, surprisingly, to Plato's *Phaedrus*, understanding that dialogue in a way that seemingly deprives the Platonic mode of thought of its metaphysical infrastructure.[108]

This reasoning surfaced in René Descartes (1596–1650), who originally had announced in the title of his *Meditations on First Philosophy* his intention to prove the immortality of the soul.[109] In his "Synopsis" to the *Meditations* Descartes argued that every substance, as created by God, is indestructible, unless God ceases to support it, including body in general as a substance. But bodies are composed of properties and as such they can perish, whereas the soul does not essentially change, despite its process of cognition, and hence is immortal.[110] Now in the *Second Meditation* Descartes had relied upon experience in proving the self to be *res cogitans*, but Marin Mersenne, in his *Second Objection*, requested the promised proof of immortality. Descartes replied, implicitly repeating Suárez' presupposition, that to prove immortality it must be sufficient to show the distinction of soul and body, because this entails that the destruction of body does not cause the destruction of the mind. More generally, even though contemplative experience reveals that mind is distinct from body, no experience reveals that substances can perish; and that may suffice to prove within the limits of natural philosophy that the mind is immortal.[111] It is obvious that Descartes is here reversing Biagio Pelacani's and Pietro Pomponazzi's argument from our inability to experience immortality, turning it into one that stresses our inexperience of mortality.

It is equally obvious that Descartes tried to salvage the intellectual soul by way of rationalism, but by his own admission was unable to prove its immortality. Not only did Pomponazzi prevail here, but epistemology, theology, and metaphysics unintentionally fell apart. Thus one of Descartes's earliest followers, the Benedictine Robert Desgabets (1610–78), protested that Descartes had delivered the belief in immortality over to mere faith. His solution was to radicalize Suárez' and Descartes's voluntarism and to claim that, once God had created the world, the soul, and truth as such, it would be impossible or inherently contradictory to let them perish. Thus could immortality be argued within a discourse of philosophical theology.[112] Nicholas Malebranche (1638–1715) continued this line of argument. On the one hand, doubt about immortality was for him just an example for



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human ignorance, probably to be accounted for by a lack of will and stability.[113] On the other hand, he claimed to have an easy proof, which consisted in the assumption that the soul is not a modification of the body. With this reductionism he repeated Descartes's doctrine that substances never perish, but he pushed it further by understanding any material substance as a bundle of properties, which resembles atomism in that decay is not annihilation but only dissolution.[114] Like Desgabets, but more elaborately, Malebranche needed to emphasize the total government of God over all creatures and man, a theme that can be seen throughout the *Recherche de la vérité*, in order to reunite the metaphysical with the theological and the epistemological questions that converged in the quest for the immortality of the soul.

## NOTES

1. Peter Lombard 1971–81 (Book II, Dist. 19B).
2. See chapter 7 in this volume.
3. See chapter 4 in this volume.
4. See McGrade 2003, 208–30, for an overview.
5. Pelacani 1974, 66, 74, 76. Biagio was influenced by John Buridan (ibid., 161ff.). See Kessler 1988, 486.
6. Gherardi 1975, 168 (Book III). In Book II, Luigi Marsili qualified the transmigration of souls as a poetic fiction and metaphor (128). As an example see Bartolomeo Facio, *De excellentia et praestantia hominis ad Pium papam secundum*, in Sandeo 1611, 151. See Di Napoli 1963, 66–9; on the humanist theme of the dignity of man see his ch. II; Garin 1979, 93–126. See also Pelacani 1974, 143ff. Tellingly, Antoninus of Florence (1389–1459) supplemented some proofs of the immortality of the soul with a series of commonplaces, because "nowadays the authority of the ancients counts more than reasons"; see Antoninus 1571, fol. 14va (tit. 1, cap. 5, § 2).
7. Pletho 1973; 327; English translation in Woodhouse 1986, 191–214: see 198ff.; see also the text in Migne 1844–91, CLX: cols. 901–4.
8. Pletho 1858, 78–83 (chs. 22 and 26).
9. Ficino's account is in the preface to his translation of Plotinus' works (1492) in Ficino 1959, II: 1537. On the mythologizing of this episode see Hankins 1990b and Blum 2004, 167–75.
10. Ficino 2001–6.
11. A summary of the argument of the *Theology* is found in Ficino 2001–6, VI: 319–26.
12. Allen 1982.
13. Ficino 2001–6, II: 262 (8.1.2): "Ascendit enim per sensum, imaginationem, phantasiam, intelligentiam." *Imaginatio*, here, takes the place traditionally assigned to memory. See Hardy 2003.
14. Ficino 2001–6, II: 265. The terminology alludes to the scholastic terminology of "second intentions."
15. Ibid., II: 269.
16. Ibid., II: 270–2.



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17. Ibid., II: 296–322.
18. Ibid., II: 354 (8.15.2). See Kristeller 1988, ch. II.
19. Augustine, *De immortalitate animae*, 1.1, 4.5–6.
20. Ibid., 6.10.
21. Ibid., 9.16.
22. Albertus Magnus 1968, 76 (*De anima*, lib. 2, tr. 1, cap. 8). For Isaac Israeli (d. 950), see Israeli 1937–8, 313. Ficino refers briefly to Albert's doctrine of the soul in his early *Di Dio et anima*, in Kristeller 1938, II: 145. The same influence of Albert is visible in Ficino's early follower Agostino Dati; see Garin 1979, 108–10. Already Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola observed that Albert (and Pletho) were influenced by Plato: see Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola 1969, II: 1218 (VI.13). On Renaissance Albertism see also Mahoney 1992.
23. Albertus Magnus 1968, 193, 194 (*De anima*, lib. 3, tr. 2, caps. 12, 20), a passage which follows his reference to Isaac Israeli. It should be noted that Averroes also used the imagery of light to describe the interaction of the intellect with material forms: see Averroes 1953, 410, lines 688–91.
24. Albertus Magnus 1968, 193 (*De anima*, lib. 3, tr. 2, cap. 13).
25. Ficino 2001–6, V: 13.
26. Ibid., V: 27.
27. Ibid., V: 53.
28. Ibid., V: 111.
29. Ibid., V: 162.
30. Monfasani 2004, article II; the *Quaestio* is edited on 192–202; see 199. On 201 he compares Plato, Averroes, Albert the Great, and Avicenna in the service of refuting Alexander; on 202 he claims that the Christian faith, Plato, and Averroes agree in denying that the soul originates from matter.
31. Ficino 2001–6, V: 152–6.
32. Ibid., III: 144 (10.4).
33. Ibid., VI: 138 (18.8).
34. Ficino 1959, II: 1537. Monfasani 2004, article II, 174, suggests that Ficino followed Argyropoulos' lead here.
35. Ficino 2001–6, V: 225 (15.19).
36. Henry More (1614–87) would be one instance; see his *Immortalitas animae*, in More 1679, 291–459. See Jacob 1985.
37. Vernia 1516, fols. 83r–91v. See Di Napoli 1963 181–93; Mahoney 2000, article III.
38. Vernia 1516, fol. 84ra.
39. Ibid., fol. 85vb.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid., fol. 86ra. See Alexander of Aphrodisias 1549, fols. 45v–47r; the slate simile is on fol. 46ra; on fol. 47ra.
42. Ibid., fol. 86rb–va.
43. Ibid., fols. 88vb, 89ra.
44. Ibid., fol. 89vb.
45. Quoted in Di Napoli 1963, 185ff. Bruno Nardi 1958 discusses Vernia in chs. IV and V; Barozzi's edict at 99–101.
46. Trombetta 1498. According to Di Napoli 1963, 195, it was first published in 1493.
47. Trombetta 1498, fols. 5vb, 6va–b.



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48. Ibid., fol. 24ra.
49. Quoted in Di Napoli 1963, 220ff. and in Constant 2002, 377–9; Constant argues that there remained much latitude for teaching nonorthodox doctrines.
50. Pomponazzi 1525, fols. 41r–51v.
51. Pomponazzi 1525, fol. 41ra–b. English translation in Cassirer *et al.* 1948, 281. On the student, Girolamo Natale, see Di Napoli 1963, 239–44. On Pomponazzi's teaching prior to the treatise see Nardi 1965b, chapter IV and *passim*; Poppi 1970, 27–92.
52. Pomponazzi 1525, fol. 41rb; Cassirer *et al.* 1948, 282. The motive of sickness is modeled on Plato's *Phaedo*: see Kristeller 1983, 13.
53. Pomponazzi 1525, fol. 41rb; Cassirer *et al.* 1948, 282. On Pomponazzi's modification of Ficino's cosmological view see Boenke 2005, 53ff.
54. Pomponazzi 1525, chs. 5–6, fols. 42vb–43ra; Cassirer *et al.* 1948, 298.
55. Mainly in *Summa theologiae*, Ia pars, qq. 75–6.
56. Pomponazzi 1525, ch. 7, fol. 43ra.
57. Ibid., ch. 9, fol. 44va; Cassirer *et al.* 1948, 315.
58. Pomponazzi 1525, fol. 45rb.
59. Aristotle, *De anima* 431a16–17 (3.7).
60. Pomponazzi 1525, ch. 9, fol. 45ra.
61. Ibid.
62. Pietro Pomponazzi, *Utrum anima rationalis sit immaterialis et immortalis*, in Pomponazzi 1966–70, II: 1–25, at 12.
63. Ibid., II: 17: "[intellectus] elevat se supra materiam et recipit universaliter et abstracte, et ut sic intellectus est immaterialis et abstractus et non secundum alios gradus."
64. Spruit 1994–5, II: 94–103. On Scotus' theory see Pluta 1986, 19–21.
65. Pomponazzi 1525, ch. 10, fols. 46vb–47ra.
66. Ibid., ch. 14, fol. 48va.
67. Ibid., fol. 50ra.
68. Ibid., fol. 51ra; Cassirer *et al.* 1948, 376.
69. Ibid., ch. 15, fol. 51rb.
70. Ibid., fol. 51va; Cassirer *et al.* 1948, 379.
71. Pomponazzi, *Lectio octava [de partibus animalium]*, in Perfetti 1998, 224: "non omnia propalanda sunt vulgaribus." For Scotus as an authority on Aristotle's inconclusiveness see Pomponazzi, *Quaestio de immortalitate animae* (1506), in Kristeller 1955, 87.
72. Di Napoli 1963, 266–7, and ch. VI. A list of polemical writings against Pomponazzi is found in Pomponazzi 1957, 468ff. See Gilson 1963, 31–61; Gilson 1961; Pine 1986, 124–234.
73. Gasparo Contarini, *Primae philosophiae compendium*, in Contarini 1578, 91–176. On Contarini see Gleason 1993.
74. Contarini 1578, 186; in Pomponazzi 1525, fols. 76vb–77ra.
75. Contarini 1578, 186–90; Pomponazzi 1525, fol. 77r–v.
76. Contarini 1578, 193; Pomponazzi 1525, fol. 78ra–b.
77. Contarini 1578, 200ff; Pomponazzi 1525, fol. 79va. On the Contarini/Pomponazzi debate see also Di Napoli 1963, 277–97.
78. Spina 1519 (*Tutela veritatis*), fol. E6vb. This is a response to Pomponazzi 1525, fol. 45ra (ch. 9). On Spina, see Di Napoli 1963, 302–9.



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79. Spina 1519 (*Tutela veritatis*), fols. H6vb–I1ra, referring to Pomponazzi 1525, fol. 51ra (end of ch. 14).
80. M.-H. Laurent, in the "Introductio" to Thomas de Vio 1938, XL–XLVII. Spina 1519 (*Propugnaculum Aristotelis*), fol. A4v, writes that an unnamed person has "iam stratam ingressus viam," but at Spina 1519 (*Flagellum*), fol. I4va, identifies the culprit: "ei [animo] secundum se non potest per se corruptio attribui ... tam insulsa et periculosa et inaudita doctrina quae a Caietano sumpsit exordium."
81. Thomas de Vio 1938 (*Commentaria* §50), 44. Compare Thomas de Vio 1514, fol. 5vb; and see Verga 1935, 31ff.
82. Thomas de Vio 1514, fol. 50ra (lib. 3). See Gilson 1963, 42.
83. Spina 1519 (*Propugnaculum Aristotelis*), fol. B3rb; the passage from book 3, quoted on fol. D2ra–b, remained uncommented on.
84. Flandinus 1519; for the persons mentioned see fols. A7v, A8r, B1r, C4r, I5r, N1r. On Fiandino see Di Napoli 1963, 267, 301; Lemay 1976.
85. Nifo 1518, fol. 3vb (§14).
86. Ibid., fols. 5rb (§21) and 5va (§22). Nifo seems to rely upon Aquinas, but his *Summa theologiae*, Ia pars, q. 76, art. 3, corpus and ad 1, unites the lower powers of the soul in the intellect.
87. Nifo 1559a, col. 720 (lib. 3, text. 20). See Kessler 1988, 497ff.
88. Pomponazzi 1525 (*Defensorium*), fols. 82rb–83rb (cap. 5). Di Napoli 1963, 309–18. On Nifo's development, see Mahoney 2000, article VII.
89. Kuhn 1996, 198–209, 592.
90. Toletus 1606, fol. 159v (lib. 3, q. 15, ad 3). Storchenau 1795, p. 387 sq. (Psychologia, pars 2, sect. 4, cap. 4, § 263). On Toletus, see chapter 13 in this volume.
91. Pomponazzi 1525, fol. 82va (*Defensorium*, ch. 5).
92. Pomponazzi 1525, fols. 112rb, 108v (letter to Javelli). The latter text and his *Solutiones* are also in Javelli 1536, fols. 24r and 31r ff. See Di Napoli 1963, 326.
93. Javelli 1536.
94. Pomponazzi 1525, fol. 108v.
95. Javelli in Pomponazzi 1525, fol. 50r (II.2).
96. An exhaustive compendium of opinions against Cajetan is found in Martinez 1575.
97. Vives 1538, 143.
98. Melanchthon 1540, fols. 246v–247r.
99. Melanchthon 1846, 16.
100. Cardano 1663, II: 403–33, 456–536; see 492 for the advice not to confound the interpretation of Aristotle with reason as such. For Jesuits who followed this split between philosophy and Aristotle see Wels 2000, 33.
101. Porzio 1551, 55 (ch. 11). See De Gaetano 1968.
102. Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola 1969, II 1216–28.
103. Steuco 1547, book 9. See Schmidt-Biggemann 2004.
104. See the Dominican friar Melchior Cano, *De locis theologicis* (1563), in Cano 1714, 430–9 (lib. 12, cap. 14).
105. Pereira 1588, 386–92 (lib. 6, capp. 18–20). See Blum 2006. A similar argument is found in Collegium Conimbricense Societatis Iesu 1598, 442–65 (tractatus de anima separata, art. 1–6). See also Mastrius and Bellutus 1643, 93–106 (disp. 1, q. 10).



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106. For instance in Toletus 1606 and Collegium Conimbricense, 1598. For Toletus and Suárez see also chapter 13 in this volume. Rodrigo de Arriaga also referred first to Scripture, but ultimately concluded that immortality can only be proven as probable, namely from the soul's inclination towards perpetuity, which is not in contradiction to its essence: see Rodericus de Arriaga 1632, 807a (de anima, disp. 10, n. 13).
107. Franciscus Suárez, *De anima*, in Suárez 1856, 535 (lib. 1, cap. 10, n. 16). See 533, n. 12 and 536–7, nn. 22–5.
108. Ibid., 535, n. 19. See also Suárez 1978, 168 (disp. 2, qu. 3, n. 6).
109. The title of the 1643 Elzevir and subsequent editions had the title *Meditationes de prima philosophia, in quibus Dei existentia, et animae humanae a corpore distinctio demonstrantur*, but the first edition (Paris: Soly, 1641) had the subtitle *in qua Dei existentia et animae immortalitas demonstrantur*. See the facsimiles in Descartes 1971–, vol. VII, after p. XVIII, and Ebert 1992.
110. Descartes 1971–, VII: 14 (*Meditationes*).
111. Ibid., VII: 127ff. (Secundae objectiones, septimo), 153ff. (Secundae responsiones, septimo). See also Descartes 1971–, III: 266 (*Correspondance*, letter to Mersenne, 24 décembre 1640).
112. Desgabets 1985 (*Supplement à la philosophie de Descartes*), esp. 210 (section 4).
113. Malebranche, *Recherche de la vérité*, in Malebranche 1958–84, II: 22–6 (IV, II, § IV).
114. Malebranche, *Réponse au livre des vraies et des fausses idées*, in Malebranche 1958–84, VI: 162ff. See *Recherche* (as in n. 113), 24. For further Cartesian repercussions see Lamy and Saint Laurens 2003. Here two other trails lie open: one that would lead from Giordano Bruno's theory of the *minimum* via Spinoza's monism to Leibniz' monadology, but then pantheism and the post-Renaissance philosophy of spirit would be the focus of interest. The other, partly overlapping, goes from Ficinian cosmology via Francesco Patrizi through modern versions of the world soul to the Cambridge Platonists and idealism. Both developments leave the specific theory of the immortality of the individual soul behind.



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# 12

PETER HARRISON

# Philosophy and the crisis of religion

Early in the evening of 17 April 1521, in the German town of Worms, Martin Luther appeared before the young emperor Charles V and assembled dignitaries of the Holy Roman Empire. Almost four years had elapsed since the defiant young monk had posted his ninety-five theses on the door of the Wittenberg Church and in the interval, to the consternation of the papal authorities, opinion in Germany had begun to swing decisively in favor of the reformer. The previous year had seen the promulgation of a papal bull formally excommunicating Luther, whose response had been to burn the document at the gates of Wittenberg. As a final attempt to head off the impending crisis, Charles V was persuaded to give Luther a hearing at the Imperial Diet, then meeting in Worms. On that first evening Luther was confronted with a pile of his publications and a hostile emperor who demanded that he acknowledge the writings and recant them. Luther asked for time to consider his position and appeared again the next evening before a large crowd. He delivered a long speech, making it clear that he had no intention of recanting:

> Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Holy Scriptures or by evident reason – for I can believe neither pope nor councils alone, as it is clear that they have erred repeatedly and contradicted themselves – I consider myself convicted by the testimony of Holy Scripture, which is my basis; my conscience is captive to the Word of God. Thus I cannot and will not recant, because acting against one's conscience is neither safe nor sound. God help me. Amen.

Tradition has it that Luther concluded his response with the bold declaration "Here I stand. I can do no other." But while these words may provide a fair reflection of Luther's attitude there is now considerable doubt about whether he actually uttered them. Several days later, Luther left for Wittenberg, still under safe-conduct, but now a confirmed heretic. On reaching Saxon territory he was spirited away in a staged kidnapping to the Wartburg Castle, high above the city of Eisenach.[1]



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This episode is generally regarded as the defining moment of the Protestant Reformation. As a consequence of this event the religious schism in Western Christendom became inevitable and irreversible. Of course, there is much more to the sixteenth-century crisis of religion than Martin Luther's theological differences with the papacy. The processes of religious reform in the sixteenth century encompassed not only Lutheranism, but also Calvinism and the Reformed Church, the Radical Reformation, and, not least, the reforms that took place with the Catholic Church itself. Nevertheless, the events that transpired at Worms exemplify a number of features of the sixteenth-century crisis of religion that are directly relevant to the status of philosophy. First, there were the proposed reforms of doctrine set out by Luther. Some of these had direct implications for particular philosophical positions or for the place of philosophy in the realm of theology. Indeed, one of the distinctive features of Luther's proposed reforms, shared to a large extent by John Calvin, was that it was primarily the doctrines or central ideas of the Church that stood in need of reformation.[2] Beyond the level of substantive difference in doctrinal commitments was a second and more fundamental disagreement about authority and the criterion of religious truth. In his closing remarks, Luther had thus insisted that the testimony of Scripture and individual conscience weighed more heavily than the determinations of popes and the councils of the Church. This raised the crucial question of the relative weight to be placed on reason, Scripture, personal experience, or ecclesiastical authority. The crisis of religion, in other words, was to a considerable degree a crisis of authority. Finally, there were important political considerations. Luther's safe-conduct to the Diet had been sponsored by Frederick the Wise, Elector of Saxony. It was Frederick who orchestrated Luther's subsequent "kidnapping," which ensured his safety in the uncertain and dangerous months following the confrontation with the emperor. Ultimately, it was the German princes, to whom Luther had appealed as allies, who ensured that the processes of reformation could be sustained. The political aspect of the crisis was tragically evident in the wars of religion and the subsequent division of Europe along confessional lines. This, in turn, affected the institutional settings in which philosophy was taught and practiced. While there are many dimensions to the religious upheavals of the sixteenth century, then, our chief focus will be the relationship between philosophy and the proposed reforms of religious ideas and practices.

## Philosophy and the reform of doctrine

The primary complaint of the religious reformers of the sixteenth century was that medieval Catholicism was a corrupt form of Christianity. There



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was, it must be conceded, considerable evidence for this view – a dissolute and undereducated clergy, a venal and bloated ecclesiastical bureaucracy, and theological doctrines that represented a significant departure from the simple gospel message of the earliest Christians. The latter was the chief concern of Martin Luther and John Calvin. For them, the basic problem with contemporary Catholicism was that it had lost sight of foundational Christian beliefs. This, in turn, was attributed to the fact that during the Middle Ages scholastic philosophers had compromised the purity of the gospel message by amalgamating it with pagan philosophy.

The idea that philosophy was a potential source of doctrinal contamination was as old as the New Testament itself. In St. Paul's letters we encounter warnings against "the wisdom of the world," "philosophy and empty deceit," and "what is falsely called knowledge."[3] This hostility to worldly wisdom was famously reprised by the North African Church Father, Tertullian, who insisted that heresy was the offspring of Greek philosophy.[4] Yet other early Christian writers cast the classical heritage in a more favorable light, suggesting that philosophy should be understood as a preparation for the Christian gospel.[5] Almost inevitably, the ideas of Plato and Aristotle came to play an important role in the articulation of Christian theology in the Patristic period and the Middle Ages. In the fifth century Augustine of Hippo cautiously endorsed elements of Platonism and relied upon Neoplatonic arguments to refute heresy. Subsequently, in the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas forged a powerful synthesis of Aristotelian philosophy and Christian theology. These alliances, especially the latter, were to become major targets of Luther and Calvin.

Luther was particularly exercised by the Aristotelian commitments of the scholastics. He insisted that the vain philosophy against which St. Paul had warned was nothing other than Aristotelian philosophy. Aristotle was the author of "unchristian, profane, meaningless babblings." God had sent him "as a plague upon us for our sins." The lauded achievements of Thomas Aquinas, in Luther's scathing assessment, simply amounted to a transformation of the Christian Church into the "Church of Aristotle."[6] Neither were Platonizing theologians exempted from criticism. Luther attacked the revered author of *The Celestial Hierarchy* – Dionysius (pseudo) – charging that he was "downright dangerous" and "more of a Platonist than a Christian."[7] John Calvin was more sympathetic to pagan philosophy, perhaps on account of his humanist background. Plato, he remarked on one occasion, was "the soberest and most religious" of all the philosophers. But this compliment occurs in the context of Calvin's observation that "the whole body of philosophers" manifested "stupidity and want of sense." The philosophers and their Christian admirers, he concludes, had "adulterated pure religion."[8]



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Even Calvin's beloved Augustine was chided for having been "excessively addicted to the philosophy of Plato."[9] As for Aristotle, while he was the head of the philosophers and a "man of genius," his heart was "perverse and depraved" and he had used his singular abilities "to destroy all light."[10]

Aristotelian philosophy played a central role in two of the most contentious theological issues of the sixteenth century – the doctrines of justification and transubstantiation. The doctrine of justification addresses the question of how sinful human beings come to be acceptable in the eyes of God. This was a crucial matter at the time because in essence it was to do with how one attained salvation. Protestants argued that the process of justification was solely an act of divine grace in which sinners were *declared to be* righteous. Human beings were saved because God chose to impute Christ's righteousness to sinners. Catholics, however, contended that human beings cooperated with divine grace in the process of justification, and that they were literally transformed into righteous beings or *made* righteous. In the Reformers' assessment, Catholic theologians had arrived at an erroneous view because they had been misled both by a mistranslation of the relevant Greek term in the New Testament and because they had been unduly influenced by Aristotle's teachings on the nature of virtue. In Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* – characterized by Luther as "the worst of all books" – we encounter the idea that one attains goodness by repeated practice. The virtues, in other words, are "habits" that make one good. Luther believed that this conception of virtue underpinned the erroneous scholastic teaching on merit – that through the continued practice of the virtues the Christian literally becomes righteous in the sight of God.[11] Righteousness, Luther insisted, "is not in us in a formal sense, as Aristotle maintains, but is outside us."[12] Hence the Christian, although justified, essentially remains a sinner. John Calvin was to make the same point, arguing that righteousness is neither the result of good works, nor an internal quality, but is literally "outside us."[13] For their part, Catholic theologians were to respond that the Lutheran position could be refuted by "philosophical reasons," and they insisted that righteousness was a quality, not a relation.[14]

Perhaps no other philosophical issue of the sixteenth century generated more controversy, or led to more bloodshed, than the question of how, during the Eucharist, the elements of bread and wine became the body and blood of Christ. The received explanation was "transubstantiation." While the term was first used by the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), the doctrine received its classic formulation in the Eucharistic teaching of St. Thomas, who explained that during the sacrament the whole *substance* of the bread and wine is transformed into the body and blood of Christ while the *accidents* (that is, the appearances) of the bread and wine remain. This explanation relies



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upon the technical Aristotelian vocabulary of substance and accidents.[15] Luther, while concerned to maintain the "real presence" of Christ in the elements of the Eucharist, denied the validity of this particular Aristotelian explanation. Transubstantiation, he concluded, "must be regarded as a figment of the human mind, for it rests neither on the Scriptures nor on reason."[16] Luther rejected not only the intrinsic merits of the philosophical case for transubstantiation, but also the competence of ecclesiastical authorities to make determinations on the matter, thus effectively denying that there were any grounds at all for adhering to the doctrine. Freed from the constraints of Aristotelian metaphysics and a central ecclesiastical authority, Protestant confessions were subsequently to adopt a wide range of views about what transpired during the Mass. Indeed, this was to become one of the central issues that divided Protestants. For its part, the Catholic Church re-endorsed transubstantiation at the thirteenth session of the Council of Trent (1551).[17]

As in the case of justification, the controversy about the real presence in the Eucharist demonstrates how doctrinal commitments could have important philosophical implications and vice versa. When in the seventeenth century René Descartes was to champion the mechanical philosophy he took considerable pains to demonstrate how transubstantiation was compatible with the new philosophy. Ecclesiastical authorities ultimately found these explanations unconvincing, and Descartes's works were placed on the *Index of Prohibited Books* in 1663 – not, as he had feared, on account of his barely-concealed Copernicanism, but because of the implications of his philosophy for the official Catholic understanding of the Mass.[18] By way of contrast, Descartes's Protestant counterparts suffered no such hindrances in their adoption of the new atomic or "corpuscular" matter theories that were incompatible with transubstantiation.

The examples of the doctrine of justification and the sacrament of the Eucharist demonstrate the extent to which philosophical issues played a central role in the doctrinal disputes of the sixteenth century. Yet not only was the content of particular philosophical doctrines a major issue; the very status of philosophy as a rational human activity was called into question. Much as the reformers' view of justification can be said to represent a revival of an Augustinian view of divine grace, so was their anthropology deeply indebted to the Church Fathers' teachings on the Fall and original sin. Both Luther and Calvin argued that the medieval Church had underestimated the extent to which human nature had been wounded as a consequence of the Fall. Calvin was thus to speak of the "total depravity" of human nature. Depravity not only consisted of an innate propensity for moral wrongdoing, but extended to the whole person, including the faculty of reason. "Sound



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reason in man was seriously injured by sin," Calvin wrote, observing that this had not sufficiently registered with many theologians in the past. Previous generations of theologians had taken too sanguine a view of human abilities, veering too close to "the philosophers," who had known nothing of the corruption of human nature.[19]

Thomas Aquinas provided an instructive example, having taught that the "natural light" of reason had persisted after Adam's fall into sin. For those who believed in the enduring integrity of the natural light, pagan philosophy, provided that it operated within set bounds, was a legitimate enterprise that could be welcomed as a useful auxiliary to Christian theology. Luther and Calvin, by way of contrast, argued that reason had not enjoyed any special immunity from the general debilitation that followed the Fall.[20] While ancient philosophers' confidence in the powers of reason was understandable, Christian theologians, armed with the knowledge of Adam's fall and of the transmission of its effects to his posterity, should have known better. Scholastic theologians, Luther wrote, "sink deeper into the abyss of spiritual darkness when they claim that natural light or intellect and heathen philosophy are also safe means for discovering truth."[21] It followed that philosophy was not a neutral instrument that could be pressed into the service of Christian theology. The philosophical enterprise was compromised from the very beginning because it assumed a view of human nature that vastly overestimated the powers of reason. This meant in turn that sinful and error-prone human beings had to rely much more on the divine revelation contained in the Scriptures than on their own fallible intellectual resources. The reformers' doubts about the reliability of human reason were thus entirely consistent with their principle *sola scriptura*, according to which Scripture was the preeminent authority in religious matters. This sober assessment of the powers of reason also went hand in hand with the idea of the moral incapacity of human beings that informed Luther and Calvin's ideas on justification.

## Authority, belief, and individual conscience

One of the most striking features of Luther's defense at the Imperial Diet was his insistence that the issues at hand were not to be determined on the basis of ecclesiastical authority – the pope or a Church council – but instead by appeals to Scripture as understood by the individual. At times, Luther can sound remarkably modern in his apparent insistence on the freedom of the individual – "I shall lift my voice simply on behalf of liberty and conscience, and I confidently cry: No law, whether of men or of angels, may rightfully be imposed on Christians without their consent, for we are free of all laws."[22]



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However, it must be said that this emphasis on the primacy of the individual conscience was tempered by reformers' belief that the final court of appeal on doctrinal matters was really Scripture. Thus, it is important to recall Luther's remark that his conscience was "captive to the Word of God." The freedom of which he spoke was primarily a freedom from the pronouncements of popes and councils on the true meaning of Scripture. Luther's allegiance was not to individual conscience per se, but rather to a conscience that was so intimately engaged with Scripture that it was virtually a "captive" to it.

The difficulty with elevating the authority of Scripture over that of popes and councils was that Scripture had to be interpreted, and some interpretations were likely to be controversial. Initially, the reformers had suggested that where it counted the meaning of Scripture was sufficiently clear. If accurate translations of the Bible were placed in the hands of the laity, if the cumulative burden of traditional exegesis was jettisoned, and if the cumbersome medieval apparatus of allegorical interpretation was replaced by simpler and more literal readings, lay persons guided by the Holy Spirit would come to grasp the plain meaning of the text for themselves. It became apparent, however, particularly in the wake of the ill-fated Peasants' War (1524–6), that this policy was a recipe for theological and social anarchy. With the passage of time Luther and Calvin came to believe that the laity would require assistance in interpreting Scripture. Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* was written with this purpose in mind.[23] Even so, there remained scope for readers to interpret Scripture for themselves, and the view that individuals were competent judges of the meaning of Scripture remained prominent amongst elements of the radical Reformation. The primacy of individual interpretation was sufficiently associated with Protestantism that the Council of Trent condemned the proposition that individuals relying upon their "own judgment" and their "own conceptions" could challenge the authoritative interpretations of "holy mother Church."[24]

Other features of Reformation thought also emphasized the role of the individual. The reformers were sharply critical of the notion of "implicit faith." This was the idea, promoted by a number of scholastic theologians, that because more abstruse doctrines of Christianity were beyond the intellectual capacities of the unlearned, they should be held "implicitly."[25] Implicit faith was thus confidence in the competence of the Church – and in particular popes and councils – to establish and promulgate the correct doctrines. The reformers strenuously objected to this understanding of faith, arguing that every Christian should have explicit knowledge of the beliefs that they professed. "Anathema be the Christian who is not certain and does not grasp what is prescribed for him," Luther asserted; "how can he believe what he does not grasp?"[26] Related to this critique of implicit faith were



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newly expressed doubts about the special status of the clergy. The reformers not only denied that final determinations about the content of doctrine and the meaning of Scripture should be left in the hands of ecclesiastical functionaries, they also called into question the sole right of the clergy to preside over the sacraments. Neither was ordination itself a sacrament that conferred some special status that distinguished the priesthood from the laity. "We are all equally priests," Luther insisted; "we have the same power in respect to the Word and the sacraments."[27] The ministry may have been a special office, but ultimately individuals had to come to their own understanding of what was to be believed.

While the major reformers were ultimately ambivalent about the role of the individual in determining the content of belief, the challenges they offered to the prevailing authorities had the consequence of opening up general questions about the proper foundations of knowledge and belief. This in turn led to renegotiations of the relationships between the standard sources of knowledge – Scripture, tradition, experience, and reason. As we have seen, Luther and Calvin elevated Scripture while the Catholics reiterated their confidence in tradition. The radical wing of the Reformation tended to stress the importance of personal experience. Reason was the beneficiary of the plurality of religious beliefs that followed in the wake of the Reformation. While the first generation of reformers had entertained serious reservations about the powers of human reason, for their successors it seemed that reason might play a role both in the articulation of new theological dogmas and in reconciling the conflicting beliefs of the different confessional groupings that had arisen in the wake of the Reformation. Philipp Melanchthon (1497–1560), while he had initially shared Luther's views about the Aristotle of the scholastics, nonetheless reintroduced Aristotle to the curriculum of the Lutheran universities. This was a humanist Aristotle however, who spoke as an unbaptised pagan rather than as a de facto Christian, and emphasis was now placed on his logic, ethics, and psychology, rather than his metaphysics.[28] In turning back to philosophy Melanchthon sought to exploit the technical resources of Aristotelianism to help resolve the doctrinal disagreements that now plagued post-Reformation Christendom.

In all of this it is apparent that the sixteenth-century crisis of religion was, perhaps above all else, a crisis of authority. Had Luther and the papacy shared a common view about how theological disputes were to be resolved, there would have at least been the possibility of some kind of resolution to the central issues under discussion at Worms. However, Luther's rejection of the authority of "popes and councils" in favor of conscience informed by the testimony of Scripture raised in a stark fashion the question of the ultimate criterion of religious authority. The example of Philipp Melanchthon shows



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how, with the passage of time, the crisis could itself provide grounds for returning to the resources provided by philosophy. In the case of Melanchthon, and Protestant scholasticism more generally, this meant a readoption of aspects of Aristotelian philosophy. However, it must also be said that as a consequence of the criticisms of humanists and reformers, the philosophical monopoly once exercised by scholastic Aristotelianism was seriously challenged, allowing for the possibility of drawing upon a range of philosophical traditions – Platonism, Stoicism, Epicureanism, skepticism. There was also room for new philosophies. In keeping with the principle *sola scriptura*, some were to argue for a "Mosaic philosophy" based on those books of Scripture attributed to Moses.[29] This stance was not necessarily incompatible with the other schools of philosophy, for it could be argued that the Mosaic writings actually taught, for example, an atomic theory of matter similar to that of the Epicureans. Such a view also fitted well with the notion of a *prisca theologia* and with the prevailing mood of philosophical eclecticism.

One of the newly revived ancient philosophies – skepticism – seemed to be particularly apt for an age riven by irreconcilable religious differences. The impasse on the issue of religious authority was a concrete example of one of the classic arguments of Pyrrhonian skepticism. One appeals to a criterion to justify a particular position. But if the criterion itself is in question, how does one decide on a criterion without begging the question? In the face of radical uncertainty, the ancient skeptics had recommended the suspension of judgment (*epoche*) in order to attain an inner tranquility (*ataraxia*). In terms of the external conduct of life, one was to adopt prevailing customs and observances, avoiding controversies that were ultimately irresolvable. For some, these prescriptions were never more appropriate than in the climate of religious uncertainty generated by the Reformation debates. With a keen awareness of the destabilizing potential of dogmatically held religious differences, Erasmus had cautiously commended the attitude of the Academic skeptics, suggesting that dispute-engendering, nonfundamental articles of doctrine become optional articles of belief. Indeed, in certain respects, the reformers' own pessimistic assessment of human intellectual powers, combined with their emphasis on faith, could sound remarkably similar to the views expressed by modern champions of skepticism. This ancient philosophy, according to its leading Renaissance proponent, Michel de Montaigne, "presents man naked and empty, acknowledging his natural weakness, fit to receive from above some outside power; stripped of human knowledge, and all the more apt to lodge divine knowledge in himself, annihilating his judgment to make more room for faith."[30] This emphasis on the fallibility and limitations of human reason, and on the consequent need to accept revealed truths, seems consistent with Protestant teachings. In other respects,



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however, the prescriptions of skepticism provided support for traditional Catholicism. As Montaigne pointed out, skeptics did not attempt to establish doctrines "against the common observances," and were "consequently free from the vain and irreligious opinion produced by false sects."[31] This argument was tailor-made for Catholic apologists.[32] For their part, Protestant theologians usually insisted that doctrines must be embraced as certain and true, for the salvation of the believer was at stake. Luther contemptuously dismissed Erasmus' advocacy of suspension of belief: "Away, now, with Sceptics and Academics from the company of us Christians."[33] But whatever the explicit attitude to philosophical skepticism of the various confessional groupings, the very fact that these groups clung to divergent views and deferred to different authorities gave rise to intellectual conditions conducive to the flourishing of skepticism.[34]

## Intellectual debts: humanism and scholasticism

It is significant that with the exception of Luther, who had been educated in a scholastic intellectual environment, the leading figures of the Protestant Reformation had received a humanist education.[35] It is hardly surprising, then, that the reformers were indebted to humanism in various ways. At the most general level the belief that Christianity needed to be reborn, a conviction expressed in the Latin motto *Christianismus renascens*, owes something to an intellectual environment in which the rebirth of letters was a central concern. The Protestant advocacy of a return to the founding documents of Christianity paralleled the humanist principle *ad fontes* – "back to the sources." This return to early Christian sources was facilitated by the linguistic labors of humanist scholars who had produced new and more accurate editions of the Church Fathers and the Bible. Of the former, the most important was an eleven-volume Amerbach edition of the works of Augustine, which appeared in 1506. Erasmus himself produced impressive editions of the works of Augustine, Ambrose, and Jerome, but by far his most influential editorial endeavor was the first printing, in 1516, of the Greek text of the New Testament. This edition, while not without flaws of its own, exposed numerous deficiencies in the Latin Vulgate – the only text of the Bible recognized by the Catholic Church. Because the Bible was the preeminent authority for Protestants and the battleground upon which many contemporary theological disputes were fought, exegetical questions to do with translation and original meaning were to take on an unprecedented significance. Lorenzo Valla's notes on the text of the New Testament, published by Erasmus in 1503 as *Annotations on the New Testament*, thus drew attention to the different implications of the Latin and Greek terms



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for repentance – respectively *poenitentia* and *metanoia*. It turned out that in the original Greek readers were enjoined to *repent*, and not to *do penance*. Justification for the sacrament of penance thus rested on a questionable translation.[36] The biblical case for other Catholic sacraments was further undermined by the realization that the Greek *mysterion* meant simply "mystery" rather than "sacrament" as rendered in the Vulgate.[37] Again, when speaking of the process of justification the Vulgate had used the factitive verb, *justificare*, literally "to *make* righteous." However, the original Greek word – *dikaiosis* and its cognates – is better translated "to *reckon* as righteous," a rendition which supported the Protestant teaching on justification. Humanist scholarship, in short, provided a foundation for Protestant contentions that some Catholic beliefs and practices were based on corruptions of Scripture.

Not only did the humanists provide the textual resources for the arguments of Protestant reformers; many of them also shared elements of the Protestant program for religious reform. Virtually all lamented the baleful influence of scholasticism, and some were also sharply critical of Aristotle. Among their number were those who revered the Church Fathers and held that Scripture was the preeminent religious authority. Some also believed in the importance of lay participation in the life of the Church. Indeed, during the second decade of the sixteenth century it seemed that humanists and reformers shared an almost identical agenda for religious reform. Lorenzo Valla, who had not only exposed the inaccuracy of the Vulgate, but had also challenged the legal basis of papal temporal authority and attacked Aristotelian moral philosophy, was greatly admired by Luther. For their part, many humanists were initially to lend their support to the proposals of Luther, Calvin, and Swiss reformer Huldreich Zwingli, believing them to be kindred spirits. By the mid-1520s, however, when both Luther and Zwingli publicly attacked Erasmus on the issue of free will, important differences were starting to become apparent. Principal amongst them was the reformers' rather bleak view of human nature, which was fundamentally at odds with the sunny optimism that characterized much humanism. From a Protestant perspective, humanism still shared with the pagan philosophy an unwarranted confidence in human capabilities.

If humanist scholarship provided some of the technical resources for Protestant theology, the much maligned scholastic philosophy also played a role in the development of some characteristically Protestant positions. The earlier Middle Ages saw the emergence of two versions of scholasticism – Thomism and Scotism – named for their respective progenitors, Thomas Aquinas and John Duns Scotus. Thomism is important for our period not only because the Reformers reacted against it, but also because it was



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officially endorsed at the Council of Trent. More important in terms of a direct influence on Reformation thought were the later schools known as the *via moderna* (the "modern way"), exemplified by William of Ockham, Pierre D'Ailly, and Gabriel Biel, and the *schola Augustiniana moderna* (the "modern Augustinian way"), represented by Gregory of Rimini and the other members of the Augustinian Order.[38] In the fourteenth century, Ockham had already expressed doubts about a positive relationship between faith and reason, denying the Thomist view that Christianity was in some sense a realization of the inchoate goals of pagan philosophy. He concluded that the intellectual efforts of the classical philosophers, while impressive in their own way, were of little use in the realm of theology. Luther had been educated in this Ockhamist tradition at the University of Erfurt, and seems to have imbibed something of this view about the relationship between theology and philosophy. Luther also relied on the arguments of the *via moderna* in his attacks on the doctrine of transubstantiation. However, he strongly rejected what he considered to be the incipient Pelagianism of the school, according to which God imbues human works with a certain value. In rejecting this view Luther resembles more closely the *schola Augustiniana moderna*, whose chief representative, Gregory of Rimini, had insisted that the righteousness of Christians lay "outside" them. As we have seen, this was the view of Luther and Calvin. The reformers also shared the emphasis of the modern Augustinians on the radically sinful nature of human beings and on primacy of the divine initiative in the process of justification.[39]

Both of the "modern" schools emphasized the radical freedom of God and the inscrutability of the divine will. This tendency, known as "voluntarism," is also characteristic of the thought of Luther and especially Calvin. In the moral realm, one of the implications of voluntarism is that God does not command good acts – rather, certain acts are good because God commands them. It follows that apparently virtuous acts carried out by human agents derive their goodness not from any putative inherent worth, but because God chooses to regard them as meritorious. The reformers' commitment to voluntarism thus explains in part their attitude to good works. For Calvin, even the redemptive work of Christ was efficacious only because of God's free decision to accept it as genuinely meritorious.[40] Calvin's voluntarist inclinations also provide a partial explanation of his difficult and counter-intuitive doctrine of election, according to which God preordains who will be saved and who will be damned. While this seems contrary to standards of natural justice, the voluntarist position was that God is not constrained in his actions by the universal dictates of reason. What is just and moral is to be understood in terms of the divine will, and not the reverse.



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## Philosophical legacies

The religious reform movements of the sixteenth century were not primarily concerned with philosophy, yet they had an important influence on the fortunes of philosophy in the early modern period. As we have seen, the crisis of authority precipitated by the Protestant Reformation gave rise to conditions that were conducive to the revival of skepticism. This, it has been suggested, led to a quest to reestablish knowledge on more certain foundations – hence, for example, the Cartesian project to ground knowledge in "clear and distinct" ideas. It can be argued that one of the distinctive features of early modern philosophy – its preoccupation with epistemology – is attributable to the sixteenth-century revival of ancient skepticism and to epistemological uncertainties generated by debates about the nature of religious authority.[41]

More broadly, in issuing challenges to entrenched religious and philosophical authorities, the reformers provided a model for general reforms of learning. Would-be innovators in other spheres of knowledge self-consciously drew their inspiration from Protestant leaders, and often explicitly invoked their example. Copernicus and Paracelsus were designated the Luther and Calvin of natural philosophy. Kepler was the self-styled "Luther of astronomy." Francis Bacon regarded the sixteenth-century reformation of religion as a providential sign that "there should attend withal a renovation and a new spring of all other knowledges."[42] Later in the seventeenth century Thomas Sprat echoed these sentiments, insisting that the Royal Society's reform of philosophy was inspired by the reform of religion in the previous century.[43]

Protestant ideas also provided a medium through which elements of late medieval scholasticism were conveyed into the modern period. The reformers' emphasis on the primacy of the divine will had implications that went well beyond the issues of merit and justification, extending to the spheres of moral, political, and natural philosophy.[44] Some have argued that the voluntarism of the reformers provided an important stimulus for the empirical investigation of the natural world.[45] If moral laws were directly dependent upon the divine will, it could be argued that the same was true of the laws governing the physical universe. Because of the inscrutability of the divine will and the fallibility of human reason, the nature of these laws had to be established experimentally rather than intuited by rational speculation. Indeed, the very idea that God's rule over nature is not mediated by causal powers that inhere in the things of nature themselves is a feature of the new sciences of the seventeenth century. The revival of Epicurean matter theory by the modern "corpuscular" philosophers, who held that matter is



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composed of minute and inert particles, meshed neatly with this voluntarist conception of God. Motion, for many of the mechanical philosophers of the seventeenth century, resulted from God directly moving particles of matter through the imposition of his will. There is a suggestive parallel between the reformers' downplaying of individual virtue in the process of justification and the mechanical philosophers' removal of inherent virtues from material objects in the sphere of natural philosophy. In both cases, causal efficacy was removed from individual persons or things and relocated in the divine will.

The crisis of religion also played a part in ensuring the tenure of Augustinian ideas in the early modern period. Elements of Augustinianism, which enjoyed considerable prominence in Reformation debates, were promoted by both Catholics and Protestants and had an impact on a variety of modern projects. The importance of Augustinian ideas in the thought of Descartes, Pascal, and Malebranche is well attested in the secondary literature.[46] Less well known, perhaps, is the way in which the experimental natural philosophy of the English Baconians was influenced by Augustinian and Calvinist ideas about the limitations of the human intellect in a fallen world. For those who emphasized the fallenness of the human mind, the laws that God had imposed on nature could not be directly intuited by the mind, but were to be gradually discovered by a careful experimental investigation of the natural world.[47]

Other elements of Protestant thought also contributed to the demystification of nature, thus making room for alternative "scientific" explanations. The reduction in the number of the sacraments effected a dramatic contraction of the sphere of the sacred. Protestants, unlike their Catholic counterparts, were also highly skeptical about the possibility of contemporary miracles, insisting that the age of miracles had ceased long ago. On account of their iconoclasm and their opposition to allegory and symbolism, the reformers also denied that the book of nature could be read, in tandem with the book of Scripture, as if it were a repository of divine truths. Natural objects, on this account, were not placed in the world as symbols of transcendental realities. Rather, the things of nature had been placed in the world for the use of its human tenants, and they bore mute testimony to the power of God. Such a view promoted the material exploitation of nature and made room for nonsymbolic accounts of the natural order such as those increasingly provided by the new philosophies of nature.[48]

Finally, it can be said that the crisis of religion played an important role in the emergence of a completely new conception of what philosophy was. The Middle Ages had witnessed the assimilation of Christianity to the classical ideal of philosophy as self-transformation and contemplation of truth.[49] Philosophy thus understood was not a theoretical enterprise but a way of life. The Protestant critique of pagan moral philosophy, combined



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with a rejection of the medieval synthesis and an emphasis on the priority of the active life, contributed to the demise of the christianized version of this philosophical ideal. Viewed through the prism of Protestant ideas of justification, the traditional philosophical goal of self-mastery was nothing other than self-delusion and heretical Pelagianism. Individuals were judged not to be capable of the moral transformations required by this model. Neither was the otherworldly focus of the ancient philosophical ideal deemed appropriate for those whose immediate destiny lay in an early vocation, and whose calling was the transformation of society and the natural world. Henceforth, philosophy is increasingly regarded as a body of doctrines.[50] Symptomatic of this transition is the philosophical eclecticism of the early modern period, which sees the philosophical schools reduced to mere repositories of techniques or teachings that may be appropriated for any relevant purpose, while general prescriptions relating to living the philosophical life are silently ignored. In this manner the sixteenth-century crisis of religion made a contribution to the development of the modern conception of philosophy in which the discipline comes to be little more than the sum of its conceptual components.

## NOTES

1. For an account of these events and Luther's speech, see Luther 1955–75, XXXII: 103–31.
2. McGrath 1999, 1–24; Ozment 1975.
3. 1 Cor. 1:19–25; Col. 2:8; 1 Tim. 6:20–1.
4. Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum*, 7.
5. See e.g. Justin Martyr, *Second Apology*, VIII, XIII; Origen, *Contra Celsum*, V.34; Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica*. See also Pelikan 1971, 27–41; Chadwick 1966.
6. Luther 2000 ("Sermon for Epiphany"), I: 332 (I, 23); Luther 1970 (*Letter to the Christian Nobility*), 93; Luther 1970 (*The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*), 144.
7. Luther 1970 (*Babylonian Captivity*), 240f. Compare Calvin 1964, I: 144 (I.14.4).
8. Calvin 1964, I: 59, 61 (I.5.11, I.5.13).
9. Calvin 1984 (*Commentary on John*), XVII: 31 (1:3).
10. Calvin 1984 (*Commentary on the Psalms*), VI: 266 (107:43).
11. Luther 2000 ("Sunday after Christmas," 6), III: 226. Compare Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 2a2ae. 58, 3; 1a2ae. 55, 3 and 4; 2a2ae. 58, 3. For Luther's assessment of *Nicomachean Ethics* see Luther 1970 (*Letter to the Christian Nobility*), 93.
12. Luther 1955–75 (*Lectures on Galations*), XXVI: 234.
13. Calvin 1844–51, III: 247; Calvin 1964, III.15; Sadoleto in Calvin 1844–51 ("Letter to the Senate and People of Geneva"), I: 9; and Calvin in ibid., III: 117, 153. Compare the views expressed at the Council of Trent, Session VI, ch. vii, in Leith 1982, 411f.
14. See Calvin 1844–51, I: 80. Both Catholics and Protestants nonetheless relied upon Aristotelian categories of causation to explain justification, disagreeing about the nature of its "formal" cause. Council of Trent, Session VI, ch. vii



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(Leith 1982, 411f.). The existence of Purgatory, denied by Protestants as unbiblical, was similarly demonstrated by Catholics from the principles of philosophy. Calvin 1844–51, I: 99.

15. Nominalist philosophers had already challenged this Aristotelian view, but maintained that one should hold to the doctrine of transubstantiation because the ecclesiastical authorities had endorsed it. See Osborne 2002.
16. Luther 1970 (*Babylonian Captivity*), 146f.
17. Council of Trent, Session XIII, ch. iv (Leith 1982, 432).
18. For Descartes's attempts to negotiate this difficulty see Bourg 2001; Nadler 1988.
19. Calvin 1964, I: 225 (II.2.4).
20. Luther 1955–75 (*Lectures on Genesis*), I: 166; Calvin 1964, I: 233f. (II.2.12). See also Helm 1998; Harrison 2002a.
21. Luther 2000 ("Sermon for Epiphany"), I: 344. Compare Calvin 1844–51, I: 75.
22. Luther 1970 (*Babylonian Captivity*), 195.
23. Calvin 1545 (French edition of the *Institutes*), preface, and Calvin 1964 (I.23).
24. Council of Trent, Session IV (Leith 1982, 403f.).
25. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 2a2ae, q. 2, a. 6.
26. Luther 1955–75 (*The Bondage of the Will*), XXXIII: 21, 23; Calvin 1964, I: 470f. (III.1).
27. Luther 1970 (*Babylonian Captivity*), 248. Compare Luther 1970 (*The Freedom of a Christian*), 291f.; Calvin 1964, II: 481 (IV.13.11).
28. Oberman 1981, 57–63.
29. Blair 2000a; Harrison 1998, 138–60.
30. Montaigne 1965a, 375.
31. Ibid., 375.
32. See e.g. Véron 1615.
33. Luther 1990, 67.
34. Popkin 2003, 3–16.
35. But on Luther's debts to humanism see Nauert 1995, 130–6.
36. Bentley 1983, 32–69; Rupp 1953, 118f. Similar considerations applied to the very word for "sacrament." See McGrath 1999, 54f.
37. Luther 1970 (*Babylonian Captivity*), 221.
38. Oberman 1981, pp. 64–110; Steinmetz 1980, 13–27.
39. Oberman 1986, 39–83. Whether Gregory's ideas had a direct influence on Luther is doubtful. See McGrath 1987, 108–15.
40. Calvin 1964, I: 453f. (II.17.1); McGrath 1987, 98–107.
41. Popkin 2003. Compare Ayers 2004.
42. Bacon 1974, 42 (I.vi.15).
43. Sprat 1667, 371.
44. Oakley 1998.
45. See e.g. Foster 1934; Oakley 1961; Osler 1994. Compare Harrison 2002b.
46. Matthews 1992; Menn 1998a; Janowski 2002; Moriarty 2003, 41–9 and *passim*.
47. Harrison 2007, chapter 2.
48. Harrison 1998, 107–20.
49. Hadot 2002, 237–52.
50. On changing conceptions of philosophy during this period see Condren, Hunter, and Gaukroger 2006.



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# 13

JOHN P. DOYLE

# Hispanic scholastic philosophy

"Hispanic scholastic philosophy" in this chapter designates a sixteenth- and seventeenth-century stream of philosophy which flowed out of medieval universities, increased to a torrent on the Iberian peninsula, then poured into other regions of Europe, America, Africa, and Asia. Arising in the wake of Spanish and Portuguese explorations and conquests, which at the end of the fifteenth and through the sixteenth century brought radically new, and usually bloody, encounters between European and non-European peoples, it was at its core concerned with such encounters. Other background themes were furnished by the Counter-Reformation, especially the reforms of the Council of Trent (1545–63) and its aftermath; the late Renaissance debates among philosophers, humanists and skeptics; and the revival of Thomistic texts and thought. Two subjects stand out as particularly important and influential: (1) moral and juridical philosophy centering on "the law of nations" (the *jus gentium*).[1] and (2) theoretical philosophy, which included Aristotelian physics but culminated in metaphysics.

For present purposes the birth year of Hispanic philosophy was 1526, when Francisco de Vitoria, OP (1492–1546), was elected to the *Cátedra de Prima* in theology at Salamanca and began lectures on the "Second Part of the Second Part" ($II^a$–$II^{ae}$) of the *Summa theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas. This introduced the *Summa* as the principal textbook in theology and also inaugurated a Thomistic revival in theology and in philosophy at Salamanca,[2] then elsewhere. Choosing a terminal date for Hispanic philosophy here is more arbitrary, but a plausible one is 1718, when Miguel Viñas, SJ (1642–1718) died. It may immediately be noted that while Vitoria taught in Spain and belonged to the older religious order of the Dominicans, Viñas was a Jesuit who taught at Santiago in Chile. In the period under discussion two salient facts are the passage of philosophical leadership from the Dominicans to the Jesuits, and the spread of Hispanic philosophy overseas from the Iberian peninsula, especially to Latin America. The development of that philosophy between 1526 and 1718 occurred within this broader context of a general shift from an old to



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a new religious order and from the Old World to a New. What follows is a very limited sketch of figures and themes in that development.

## Francisco de Vitoria on the morality of conquest and just war

Vitoria was almost certainly the most influential figure in sixteenth-century Hispanic philosophy: in the century after his death, nearly all moralists looked back to his authority. One may start with his Dominican successors in the *Cátedra de Prima* at Salamanca, whose names constitute an honor roll of Spanish and Counter-Reformation scholasticism.[3] But beyond Spain and Catholic circles, Vitoria helped shape the emerging field of international jurisprudence through his influence on figures such as Alberico Gentili (1552–1608) and Hugo Grotius (1583–1645).[4] Comparing his influence with the dearth of work he published in his lifetime, Domingo Bañez, OP (1528–1604), would aptly refer to him as "another Socrates."[5] His interests ranged over scholastic theology and philosophy but his main work was in the area of international law and morality – or, in the language of the time, the *ius gentium*.

Following the discoveries and conquests in America, serious questions arose in Spain about the morality of those conquests, about the dignity and rights of the conquered people, and about the titles of Spanish rule over them. Occupying as he did the principal chair of theology at the most prestigious Spanish university, Vitoria was able to bring these questions into prominence when in January of 1539 he delivered his famous *Relectio de Indis recenter inventis* ("A Re-lecture on the Recently Discovered Indians"), which he followed in June of the same year with his *Relectio de iure belli* ("A Re-lecture of the Right of War").[6]

In his *De Indis* (I, nn. 23–4), Vitoria maintains that, before the arrival of the Spaniards, the peoples of the New World were masters of themselves and their property. He then (II, nn. 1–16) rejects seven illegimate titles that had been offered to justify their subjugation and dispossession by the Spaniards. These included the claim that the emperor (then Charles V) or the pope is the lord of the whole world and so also of these peoples and their territories and, thus, could place them under the rule of the Spaniards. Allied with this was a claim that the Amerindians, unwilling to accept the Faith of Christ, could be forced to do so. Or that because of their "unnatural sins," God had condemned them and had given them to the Spaniards, "just as long ago He gave the Canaanites into the hands of the Jews."

Rejecting such titles, and along the way condemning the excesses of the conquistadors, Vitoria defends as more legitimate several other titles to dominion (III, nn. 1–18), titles which would become fundamental for the development of international law. The first, based upon "natural society and



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communication," was that the Spaniards have rights to travel into these new regions, to live and to trade there, "as long as they do no injury." Possessing such rights, it is lawful for the Spaniards to defend themselves in their exercise and to occupy territories in the interests of their own security. A second legitimate title may be based on the right, even the duty, of the Spaniards to preach the gospel in the new provinces and if necessary, in order to provide security for these missions, to wage war. A further title, derived from the second, might apply in the following case: if some of the inhabitants of those provinces have been converted, and their rulers, by force or fear, attempt to bring them back to idolatry, the Spaniards, if other means are not possible, can make war against those rulers and compel them to desist from that wrong. They may also rightfully pursue war against those who are obstinate, with the result that they may sometimes depose rulers, as in other just wars. In the same vein, there is a fourth title which is connected with the so-called "Pauline privilege" (based on 1 Corinthians 7:15), whereby the Church, to preserve the faith of a Christian spouse, may dissolve his or her marriage to an implacable pagan. By analogy, if a large part of the Amerindians have been converted to Christ, the pope could, for a reasonable cause, whether they asked for it or not, depose their infidel rulers and give them a Christian prince. A fifth title to dominion might be applicable on grounds of tyranny: either an actual tyranny exercised by the pagan rulers themselves, or simply the imposition of tyrannical laws by pagan rulers that might cause injury to innocent people. A sixth legitimate title could come through a *genuine* voluntary election. For example, if the Amerindians should wish to accept the king of Spain as their prince, this could be done rightly under the umbrella of natural law. A seventh title to conquest could apply if a war of conquest should be undertaken for the sake of allies and friends. For inasmuch as the people of the New World sometimes wage wars among themselves, and a side which has suffered an injury has a right to wage such war, "it can call the Spaniards to its aid and share with them the rewards of victory." A final title, which Vitoria mentions but does not assert as valid, could be to bring civilization to barbarians; such a title would allow the Spanish sovereigns to take over supervision of the Amerindians for their own benefit.

These legitimate titles were in large degree hypothetical. In fact, Vitoria deplored the reports he had heard "of so many massacres, so much plundering of otherwise innocent people, so many rulers toppled and stripped of their possessions and dominion" (1, 3), all of which gave "reason enough to doubt whether such things have been done rightly or wrongly" (ibid.). At the same time, now that it had been done and there were so many facts on the ground, he did not think that the Spaniards could just walk away from the nations and lands of the New World or abandon all commerce with



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them. He thought it especially "clear that, in view of the genuine conversion of many barbarians in these provinces, it would be neither proper nor lawful for a Spanish sovereign entirely to renounce their governance" (III, 18).

Many of Vitoria's conclusions and his complaints against the conquistadors appeared more passionately a little later in the teachings and writings of Alonso de Vera Cruz (1507–84). Born in Toledo, Vera Cruz heard Vitoria at Salamanca and then migrated to Mexico where he joined the Augustinian Order. In 1553 he became the first holder of two chairs of theology and Scripture at the nascent University of Mexico, the first university in the New World. In that capacity, Vera Cruz authored numerous works, among them his *De dominio* ("On Dominion," 1553), in which, combining the positions and principles of Vitoria with his own eyewitness experience of the injustice of the Spanish *encomenderos*, he condemned these and vigorously defended the rights of the Indians to dominion over themselves and their possessions.

In his *Relectio de iure belli*, Vitoria treats what will later be termed the *ius in bello*, what is right in war, but concentrates on what will be called the *ius ad bellum*, the right to go to war. In so doing he composed one of the foundational documents for just war theory. Against the background of Spanish wars in the New World, he asks four questions. First, is it lawful for Christians to wage war? Second, who has just authority to declare or to wage war? Third, what are the causes of a just war? Fourth, what can Christians lawfully do against their enemies?

Rejecting pacifism as a necessary consequence of Christian faith, Vitoria answers the first question in the affirmative (n. 2). To the second question he says that anyone, even a private citizen, can defend himself (nn. 2–4). Beyond this, every republic or state has authority, not only to defend, but also to avenge itself and its subjects as well as to prosecute injuries, and sovereigns have the same right in this as does the republic (nn. 5–6). This raises questions, which Vitoria addresses, about what is a republic and who is a sovereign (nn. 7–9). A republic, he tells us, is a perfect community, "one which is by itself whole, which is not a part of any other republic, but which has its own laws, its own senate [*consilium*] and its own magistrates, such as, for example, the kingdom of Castille and Aragon and the government [*principatus*] of Venice and others like them" (n. 9). Parallel to this, a sovereign with the right to make war must be the ruler of such a republic. "Petty kings or princes, who do not rule over a perfect republic but over parts of another republic, cannot carry on or wage war. Examples would be the duke of Alba or the count of Benavente, for these are parts of the kingdom of Castile" (ibid.) and as a result are not perfect republics.

Answering the third principal question, Vitoria allows one cause only for a just war: an injury received, of sufficient size to warrant war (nn. 13–14).



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To the fourth question, he replies that in a just war it is permissible to do what is necessary for the common good and its defense (n. 15). It is also lawful in a just war to recover lost goods or their value (n. 16). For this, it is lawful to seize from the goods of an enemy the cost of a war and of damages inflicted by that enemy (n. 17). Further, in a just war the sovereign can do all things necessary to have peace and security from enemies (n. 18). And, "after victory has been secured, possessions have been recovered, and peace as well as security obtained, it is lawful to avenge injury received from enemies and to attack those enemies and punish them for the injuries suffered" (n. 19).

## Domingo Soto, OP (1494–1560)

Among Vitoria's successors at Salamanca, Domingo Soto also devoted considerable attention to issues raised by the Spanish conquests in the New World, although his philosophical concerns ranged as well over Aristotelian logic and natural philosophy. His huge tractate *De iustitia et iure* ("On Justice and Law"), first published in 1559, was reprinted at least twenty-seven times and was followed by a series of similarly named works on juridical and economic topics by other Hispanic philosophers.[7] It presents a Thomistic doctrine updated to confront sixteenth-century issues.[8] Law, defined as "an ordinance of reason," is divided into eternal, natural, and positive (divine and human). Human positive law includes "the law of nations" (*ius gentium*) which human beings have everywhere established for themselves without deliberative assemblies or explicit enactments. Instead, by reason alone all human beings are in basic agreement on the main facts of dominion, private property, exchanges, buying and selling, war and peace, slavery in some instances, keeping faith even with enemies, the immunity and protection of ambassadors, etc.

As a theological expert on the issue of war, in 1551 Soto presided over the famous Junta de Valladolid, convoked to judge the morality of the Spanish conquest of the New World. The principal item before the Junta was a debate between the humanist Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda (*c.* 1490–1572), who defended what the conquistadors had done, and their severest critic, Bartolomé de las Casas, OP (1474–1566).[9] Soto composed a summary of the debate which presented both positions fairly but did not take sides. His own view was in favor of Las Casas and this was reflected in his *De iustitia*.

## Early Jesuit philosophy

Famous as a theologian and philosopher, Soto was also a teacher of the first Jesuit philosopher–theologian of note, Francisco de Toledo, or Toletus



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(1533–96). In addition to volumes on Aristotelian logic, natural philosophy, and psychology, Toletus left a partial commentary on the *Summa* of Aquinas, in the course of which (commenting on $II^a$–$II^{ae}$, q. 57, a. 3) he separated the *ius gentium* from natural law and set the stage for later Jesuits such as Francisco Suárez (1548–1617) to do the same. He also in various ways expanded the treatment of just war. For instance, commenting on Aquinas' *Summa* ($II^a$–$II^{ae}$, q. 34, a. 1, dub. 4), he distinguished three kinds of soldiers: those subject to some prince, those not subject who have accepted salaries to fight in time of war, and those not subject and not salaried. He discussed the obligations of each kind of soldier to think of the justice of any war in which they take part as well as the obligations to restitution which they might incur.

Other Jesuits after Toletus included Francisco Suárez, to whom we will return, as well as Pedro da Fonseca (1528–99). Fonseca's main contributions were to logic and metaphysics. In logic, he wrote *Institutionum dialecticarum libri VIII* ("Eight Books of Dialectical Training"). Published at Lisbon in 1564 and reprinted fifty-one more times by 1625, it was the textbook most in use, especially by Jesuits, throughout Europe, America, and the Far East. In metaphysics, Fonseca produced *Commentariorum in libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis Stagiritae tomi 4* ("Four Volumes of Commentaries on the Books of Metaphysics by Aristotle of Stagira"), which contains a critical Greek text, a literal Latin translation, an explanation of the text following each chapter, and then commentary "by way of question" on most of the chapters through the first nine books of the *Metaphysics*. Published posthumously, Books 10, 11, and 12 continue to give the Greek and Latin plus the explanation, while Books 13 and 14 give only the text in the two languages.

Fonseca says (*On Metaphysics* IV, c. 1, qu. 1, s. 3) that the subject of metaphysics is being insofar as it is common to God and creatures. Between God and creatures, between created substance and accidents, between different classes of accident and between real being and beings of reason, being is analogous by analogies both of proportion and of attribution. Being as such is transcendent, as are also the concepts of thing (*res*), something (*aliquid*), one, true, and good (ibid., qu. 5, s. 2). Following Aristotle, Fonseca excludes from the subject of metaphysics both incidental beings (*entia per accidens*) and beings of reason (*entia rationis*).

From 1555 to 1561, Fonseca taught philosophy in the Jesuit-directed College of Arts at the University of Coimbra, where he promoted the idea of a "Coimbran Course of Philosophy," a *Cursus Conimbricensis*.[10] Through the efforts of fellow Jesuits at Coimbra this appeared in five volumes between 1592 and 1606 and included texts of and commentaries on Aristotle's *Physics, De caelo, De generatione et corruptione, De anima, Ethics*, and *Dialectics*.



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The *Dialectics* is especially noteworthy for its treatment of signs (in *De interpretatione*, c. 1).[11] Distributed by the Jesuits, these volumes were influential in Europe, America, and the Far East, including both Japan and China. The main bibliographer of the Society of Jesus, Carlos Sommervogel, SJ (1834–1902), has cited the seventeenth-century Jesuit polymath, Athanasius Kircher (1601–80), who attested that by his time the Coimbra commentaries had been translated into Chinese.[12] Much of this was done by the Portuguese Jesuit, Francisco Furtado (1584–1653), and Li Chih Tsao (1565–1630), a Christian convert and friend of the famous Matteo Ricci, SJ (1552–1610).

From 1572 to 1582, and again in 1592, Fonseca was in Rome, where among other tasks he worked on the *Ratio studiorum* ("Plan of Studies") which was adopted in 1599 by the Society of Jesus and became the most influential school curriculum in the early modern Catholic world. Brother Jesuits at the Collegio Romano for some of Fonseca's time there included Benito Pereira (1535–1610) and Francisco Suárez. During Fonseca's assignments in Rome, Pereira was teaching theology. Earlier he had taught philosophy there and in 1562 had published *De communibus omnium rerum naturalium principiis et affectionibus libri XV* ("Fifteen Books about the Common Principles and Properties of All Natural Things") which went through numerous editions and was cited frequently by Galileo, among others.[13] In this work, Pereira defended the role of philosophy and paid special attention to the distinctions and relations between philosophy and theology, science and faith, as well as among the various sciences.[14] He voiced the need for a first philosophy or general science that would treat of what transcends all existing and possible things. This general science would be distinct from the science of metaphysics, which treats of separate intelligences, especially God. Carlo Giacon sees this as anticipating by two centuries the Wolffian separation of a general ontology from other parts of metaphysics.[15] Remarkable also is the emphasis which Pereira placed on experience in the study of natural philosophy or physics.[16]

## Francisco Suárez (1548–1617)

But it was Francisco Suárez, SJ, more than any other Jesuit of his day, who had depth and breadth as well as influence. Suárez studied and taught at different places: in Spain, at Rome, and finally at Coimbra. In philosophy he wrote chiefly on metaphysics and the philosophy of law. The two volumes of his 1597 *Disputationes metaphysicae* ("Metaphysical Disputations") divide metaphysics into two parts. The first deals with being in general, its properties and causes, while the second considers particular beings and classes of being – God, creatures, and the Aristotelian categories. The object of



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metaphysics is "being insofar as it is real being," which excludes being *per accidens* and beings of reason. Prescinding from existence, this object transcends all genera, species, and differences and encompasses everything real, from extrinsic denominations (such as "being right," "being left," "being known," or "being willed"),[17] through mere possibles, to actual created substances and accidents, to the subsistent, purely actual, and necessary reality of God. Over the range of such beings, being is analogous with "an analogy of intrinsic attribution," which presupposes a common unified concept divided in an order of prior and posterior.[18] Following a general treatment of the properties of every being *qua* being – namely, unity, truth, and goodness – questions are raised about each of these properties. The rest of the first part considers the various causes of being.

The second part opens with the division of being into infinite and finite. The existence of God is proven in an explicitly metaphysical way, reflecting the influence of the Islamic philosopher Avicenna (980–1037), by tracing the order of being from effect to cause. After consideration of the nature of God, the *Disputationes* goes on to treat of creatures and the categories – substance and accidents – of being. It concludes with an important discussion of "beings of reason," which are divided into negations, privations, and mind-dependent relations.[19] At the heart of negations were so-called "impossible objects," of which more will later be said.

In his philosophy of law, which is mainly presented in *De legibus* ("On Laws"),[20] Suárez tells us that all law stems from the eternal law, which is "a free decree of the will of God establishing the order to be observed either generally by all parts of the universe in relation to the common good ... or especially to be observed by intellectual creatures in their free operations" (II, c. 3, n. 6). By emphasizing God's will, Suárez distinguished himself from Thomas Aquinas (1225–74) who identified the eternal law with Divine Reason as it governs the created universe.

Immediately derived from the eternal law is the natural law which resides in the human mind and enables human beings to discern what is morally good or evil. In *De legibus* II, c. 7, basically following Aquinas, Suárez tells us that natural law precepts are first of all general principles like "good must be done and evil avoided" and "do not do to anyone else what you would not want done to you." Next come more particular principles which are still evident, for example: "justice should be observed," "God should be worshiped," "one should live with self-control," etc. From these principles come conclusions which may be more or less easily and broadly known. Thus it is more easily and more widely known that such things as adultery and theft are wrong. Requiring more reasoning and not easily known to all are conclusions such as: "fornication is intrinsically evil," "usury is unjust," or "lying can never be



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justified." Suárez asserts that the natural law obliges human beings everywhere and always. No one, he says, can be invincibly ignorant about first principles of the natural law. Particular precepts, including the second class of principles and the first class of conclusions, can be unknown, but not for long without fault. More remote natural law conclusions can be invincibly unknown, at least by the common people, who lack education and subtlety.

Rejecting both the opinion of William of Ockham (1290–1349) that God can dispense from all the commands of the Decalogue and could indeed abrogate the whole natural law (*De legibus* II, 15, n. 4), and the opinion of Duns Scotus (1266–1308), that God can dispense from the seven precepts in the second table of the Decalogue (ibid., n. 9), Suárez maintains that the whole Decalogue is indispensable even by the absolute power of God (ibid., n. 16). Therefore, at this level, while it is rooted in the divine will, law is not arbitrary, even for God.

The *ius gentium* stands for Suárez between the natural law and the positive laws of individual states. Unwritten, but having the general character of positive law, it has been established not by a single state but rather by the customs of all or almost all nations (*De legibus* II, 19, n. 7). In this way, the *ius gentium* originates in human consensus and it can in principle, although not with ease, be changed.

Coming under the *ius gentium* were the traditional rights listed in the *Etymologies* of Isidore of Seville (*c.* 562–636): to occupy otherwise unoccupied territory, to wage wars in defense of that occupation, to take prisoners in those wars, as well as to enslave such prisoners. Also covered were treaties and the immunity of ambassadors as well as a prohibition of miscegenation, which Suárez reduces to a prohibition of religiously mixed marriages (*De legibus* II, c. 19, n. 10). For Suárez the *ius gentium* further embraced the actual division of peoples and kingdoms themselves, the division of possessions, private property, buying and selling, the use of money and free commerce among nations.

The *ius gentium* is twofold. First, and most properly, it is international law – "the law of nations among themselves [*inter se*]" – a law which nations are obliged to observe *vis-à-vis* one another. Such principles as those relating to ambassadors and international commerce as well as the "right of war" (*ius belli*) belong to the *ius gentium* taken in this way. Second, it is "the law of nations within themselves" (*intra se*), i.e. the law which individual states commonly observe within their own boundaries. Most other items mentioned just above belong to the *ius gentium* taken in this second way.

Although war should be avoided wherever possible, it was at times, Suárez thought, the only option open for the preservation of the republic, which has a right and even an obligation to defend itself or innocent persons



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(*De legibus* II, c. 18, n. 5). In order that any war be just, proper authority (legitimate, public, and supreme) was required to declare it. Again, a just and grave cause was needed. Third, due restraint (*debitus modus*) should be the rule at the outset of the war, in its prosecution, and in victory afterwards. As regards the authority to declare and wage it, war may be based upon one state's right to punish, avenge, or repay an injury done it by another. The right here is not, as Vitoria earlier saw it, "by the authority of the whole world." Instead, each state, "supreme in its own order" (*De legibus* III, c. 1, n. 6) – i.e. the temporal order – with no tribunal beyond, has the authority forcibly to redress injuries against itself. Civil power is not greater in Christian princes than in pagan princes. Both Christians and pagans may defend themselves, avenge injury, or protect the innocent. But beyond this Christians can claim no further rights. They may not make war against infidels solely for the reason of their infidelity.

From Vitoria on, it was commonly held by Catholic theologians that the Amerindians were human beings, lords of their own lives and possessions, and that it was not lawful without just cause to subjugate and despoil them – even in order to christianize them. This too was Suárez's position, which he took, however, on an abstract level, almost without mention of the Indians of America. Against a possible application to the Indians of Aristotle's division of human beings into those fitted by nature to rule and those who were by nature slaves (*Politics* 1.5.1254a18–1255a2), Suárez held it incredible to say that all the people in any region or province have been born "monstrous and in a way that contradicts the natural disposition" of human beings to be free (*De iustitia et iure*, qu. 6).[21]

From the start of the human race, people have been by nature free. But even if they had remained sinless, some political power would eventually have existed. As Aristotle (*Politics* 1.2.1253a2) said, man is by nature political. Thus the state (the *polis*) is natural. Yet it is also voluntary. Naturally inclined to political association, free persons must still agree to it. Hence, the state itself arises out of a contract (*consensus*), explicit or tacit, freely entered into by the community. People are not forced by nature to choose any particular form of state and in fact there are different forms existing in different regions, with a natural equality among all such forms and the political power they exercise. In practice the best government is a monarchy. But what pattern a monarchy takes and how much power any monarch will have will depend upon the terms of the initial grant of the people. In this way, civil authority, in any form, is ultimately from nature and nature's God, but immediately from the people.

Each state is "supreme in its own order," but the power of one ends where that of another begins. Again, the power of any state, even within its own



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territory, is not absolute. Though ordinarily their gift of power is irrevocable, the people retain in principle authority over their government. As the common good demands, political power, even that of a king, may in different circumstances be changed or limited. In his 1613 *Defensio fidei catholicae* ("A Defense of the Catholic Faith"),[22] Suárez opposed the absolute right of kings and defended the indirect power of the papacy over temporal rulers as well as the citizen's right to resist a tyrannical monarch – even to the point of tyrannicide in the case of a monarch deposed for heresy by the pope. Earlier, the legitimation of tyrannicide had been attributed to another Jesuit, Juan de Mariana (1536–1623), who in his *De rege et regis institutione* ("On a King and the Education of a King,") of 1599 had seemingly praised the assassin of Henry III of France (although he had not in fact approved of his action).

For Suárez, state power stops at a private zone of families and individuals, which are by nature prior to the state. Again, while he admits a legitimate concern on the part of the republic for its citizens' morality, Suárez tell us that, even at a natural level, each person aims at a final happiness which transcends the reach of civil laws and power. On the question of Church and state, while each is "supreme in its own order," the basic relation between the two is hierarchical, comparable to that between the soul and the body. The power of the many states of this world is directly and exclusively within the temporal order, aiming at a common temporal good of "political happiness." The power of the one Christian Church, oriented toward the eternal salvation of its members, is directly within the spiritual order. Indirectly, however, that Church has power over a Christian state even in temporal matters. Suárez saw this as enhancing the condition of Christian states, inasmuch as by their subordination to the Church they are raised to a new quasi-supernatural level.

## Luis de Molina, SJ (1536–1600)

Luis de Molina, who studied under Fonseca, taught for many years at the University of Evora in Portugal. His most famous work, *Concordia liberi arbitrii cum gratiae donis, divina praescientia, providentia, praedestinatione et reprobatione* ("The Concordance of Free Choice with the Gifts of Grace, Divine Foreknowledge, Providence, Predestination, and Reprobation")[23] defended human free acts in the face of God's causality and foreknowledge. His central position was that efficacious grace infallibly led to human assent, not from its own internal nature, but from the free consent of the created will, which consent God foreknows by his "middle knowledge" (*scientia media*)[24] of future possibilities, i.e. "futuribles."

The *Concordance* was attacked by the Dominican Domingo Bañez, who proposed what was accepted as the Thomistic theory of God's physical



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predetermination of human acts to a definite outcome. Jesuits and Dominicans took sides behind Molina and Bañez. The matter went first to the Spanish Inquisition and then to Rome where eighty-five sessions of the so-called "Congregation on the Assistance of Divine Grace" were held, which resulted in no decision except that neither side should call the other "heretical."

In the seventeenth century, Molina's doctrine provoked continued controversy and in diverse ways served to define a distinctively Jesuit school of philosophy and theology. Among other things it led to distinctive Jesuit theories of possibility, necessity, and probability. Names here include, but are certainly not limited to, Antonio Perez (1599–1649), who succeeded Juan de Lugo (1583–1660) in a chair of theology (1642–8) at Rome, and Agustín de Herrera (1623–84), in whose *Treatise on the Will of God* (1673) there is a remarkable treatment of the calculus of probabilities against the background of God's knowledge of what free human beings will with moral certainty do. Both Perez and Herrera were known to Leibniz and they have been subjects of recent scholarly work by Tilman Ramelow, Sven Knebel, and Jacob Schmutz.[25]

Molina was also the author of a treatise *De iustitia et iure* ("On Justice and Right"), which, though left unfinished at his death, is important for its inclusion of economic issues (see, for example, his treatment of insurance contracts),[26] for its criticism of Portuguese conduct in Africa, and for its castigation of the black slave trade.[27] Similar castigation may be found in the work of the Brazilian Jesuit, Antonio Vieira (1608–97), who, preaching in Portuguese, compared the sufferings of black slaves to those of Christ and threatened slaveholders with eternal damnation.

## Iberian Dominicans of the later Renaissance

Some other later Iberian Dominicans of note include Bañez's student, Diego Mas (1553–1608), Francisco Araujo (1580–1664), Cosmas de Lerma (d. 1642), and João Poinsot, sometimes known as John of St. Thomas (1589–1644). Mas is notable as the author in 1587 of *Metaphysica disputatio de ente et eius proprietatibus* ("A Metaphysical Disputation about Being and its Properties"), which in some measure anticipated the *Disputationes* of Suárez. From 1617 to 1643, Araujo held the *Cátedra de Prima* of theology at Salamanca and later became archbishop of Segovia. He composed an important *Commentaria in universam Aristotelis metaphysicam* ("Commentaries on the whole *Metaphysics* of Aristotle," 2 vols., 1617–31) and defended Dominican interpretations of Thomas Aquinas against those of the Jesuits, principally the nominalistic Pedro Hurtado de Mendoza, SJ (1578–1641). However, on the central issue between Bañez and Molina, Araujo opposed



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Bañez's physical predetermination and adopted instead a doctrine of moral predestination, which on the face of it was closer to Molina. Cosmas de Lerma was acclaimed for his summaries and commentaries on the works of Domingo Soto.

João Poinsot or John of St. Thomas achieved lasting fame both in philosophy and theology as one of the principal representatives of Thomistic thought. He was born in Lisbon and studied at Coimbra, most likely in part under the Jesuits, who certainly influenced his thinking on signs.[28] After joining the Dominicans in 1609 at Madrid, he studied philosophy and theology which he afterwards taught. In 1631 he produced the first edition of his *Cursus philosophicus thomisticus*, which comprised logic and natural philosophy, and then in 1637 his *Cursus theologicus*. In both his philosophical and theological writings, he covered a wide range of issues in metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. Invariably he took Thomistic positions and sought to defend Thomistic doctrine against its adversaries. Chief among these adversaries, as Poinsot saw them, were the Jesuits Francisco Suárez, and Gabriel Vásquez.

## Jesuit philosophers and theologians of the later Renaissance

Gabriel Vásquez (1549–1604) too was a major theologian. After joining the Jesuits, he studied philosophy and then theology under Domingo Bañez at Alcalá. Within the Jesuit Order Vásquez became the rival and opponent, personally and professionally, of Suárez, whom he twice succeeded in teaching positions: at Rome in 1585 (where he taught theology until 1590) and then at Alcalá in 1592. In his teaching Vásquez followed the main lines of the Jesuit school, but often with his own flourishes. His principal theological work was his *Commentariorum et disputationum in Summam sancti Thomae tomi IV* ("Four Volumes of Commentaries and Disputations on the *Summa* of St. Thomas"), published between 1598 and 1615. In metaphysics, Vásquez, like Suárez and most other Jesuits after Pereira, rejects the Thomistic doctrine of the real distinction in creatures between essence and existence. He identifies the metaphysical essence of God with "aseity" and defines the infinity of God by an infinite number of infinite attributes. He defends the thesis that this world could not be the best of all possible worlds. On free will in relation to God he generally follows Molina. In his legal philosophy, he holds that natural law is independent of all will, even that of God.[29]

Besides those already mentioned, other seventeenth-century Hispanic Jesuits who deserve mention include Francisco de Oviedo (1602–51), Rodrigo de Arriaga (1592–1667), Antonio Bernaldo de Quiros (1613–68), and from Catalonia, Sebastian Izquierdo (1601–81). Oviedo's *Integer*



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*cursus philosophicus* (1640) was one of the most influential textbooks of the seventeenth century. Arriaga is especially important, because, after studying under Hurtado de Mendoza and Juan de Lugo, then teaching philosophy in Spain, he carried Hispanic scholasticism in 1625 to the University of Prague, where he was chancellor for twelve years. He authored the first complete textbook of philosophy in the seventeenth century, a *Cursus philosophicus* which, appearing in 1632 and re-edited many times, was clearly of a nominalistic bent.[30] Both Oviedo and Arriaga were read by Pierre Bayle (1647–1706) and Arriaga's *Cursus* was much used by Leibniz. Bernaldo de Quiroz produced an *Opus philosophicum* (1666) which was the last great seventeenth-century philosophical textbook in the nominalistic tradition of Hurtado de Mendoza. Izquierdo was the author of a famous *Pharus scientiarum* ("The Light-house of Sciences"),[31] who, while continuing the main line of his order's philosophy, was intent on revising Aristotelian logic and was open to current scientific trends. He was a disciple of Ramon Llull (*c.* 1235–1316), a fellow Catalan, and he too was read and appreciated by Leibniz.

## Iberian scholasticism outside of Iberia

Non-Iberian Jesuits who transmitted Hispanic philosophy in their work included the Englishman, Thomas Compton Carleton (1591–1666), the Italian, Sylvester Mauro (1619–87), the Frenchman, André Semery (1630–1717), plus the Poles, John Morawski (1633–1700) and Maximilian Wietrowski (1660–1737). Of particular interest to these writers was the sophisticated Hispanic debate about "impossible objects," meaning self-contradictory items, like "square circles," about which we can think and speak, but which cannot be realized in the world outside the mind.[32] Mention also should be made here of the Flemish Jesuit, Leonard Lessius or Leys (1554–1623), who studied theology for two years under Suárez in Rome, and then at Louvain in 1605 published a *De iustitia et iure ceterisque virtutibus cardinalibus* ("On Justice and Right and the Other Cardinal Virtues"). His chapters on usury, interest, insurance,[33] banking, money changing, and other economic topics made him a leading figure in the ethical discussion of issues associated with the emerging capitalist economy of Europe.

Not to be overlooked is the extension of Hispanic philosophy and theology into the Protestant university world of the seventeenth century by both Lutheran and Calvinist thinkers. Among the Lutherans were Jacob Martini (1570–1649) and Christoph Scheibler (1589–1653); the latter was the author of an *Opus metaphysicum* (1617) and was dubbed "the Protestant Suárez."[34] Others were Daniel Stahl (1585–1654) and his pupil Johann Stier



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(1588–1648). Calvinists included Clemens Timpler (1568?–1624), who in his *Metaphysicae systema methodicum* ("A Methodical System of Metaphysics," 1616) said that the proper and adequate subject of metaphysics was "everything intelligible," which embraced not only real being but also being of reason. Departing from Suárez and mainstream Aristotelian philosophers, this position would resonate afterwards in the doctrine of "supertranscendentals."[35] Other Calvinists who in various degrees continued themes of Hispanic philosophy included Rudolph Goclenius (1547–1628), the Marburg philosopher who first coined the term (in Greek) *ontologia*,[36] Bartholomew Keckermann (1571–1609), the Scot Gilbert Jack (1578–1628), and the Dutchmen Franco Burgersdijk (1590–1629) and Adrian Heereboord (1614–53). The latter all taught at Leiden and were influenced especially by Suárez, whom Heereboord in his *Meletemata philosophica* ("Philosophical Exercises") of 1665 admiringly called "the prince and pope of all metaphysicians."[37] Through Calvinists such as these, Hispanic scholasticism was even influential at Harvard College in British North America throughout most of the seventeenth century.[38]

## Hispanic philosophy in the New World

Alonso de Vera Cruz and Antonio Vieira have already been mentioned as participants in the New World tradition of Hispanic philosophy. Others who might be included in the same way are the Dominican Tomás de Mercado (1530–79) as well as Antonio Rubio (1548–1615), the brothers Peñafiel, and Miguel Viñas, all Jesuits. Born in Seville, Mercado entered the Dominican Order in Mexico, most probably in 1552. There and afterwards in Salamanca and Seville he studied and taught. He authored works on the thirteenth-century logic textbook of Peter of Spain and the *Organon* of Aristotle, but he is best known for his *Suma de tratos y contratos* ("Summary of Agreements and Contracts").[39] Growing out of his counseling of merchants in Seville and influenced by the *De iustitia* of Soto, Mercado's *Suma* focused on economic morality against a background of natural law. Important in its own right, the *Suma* anticipated the economic ideas of later writers such as Francis Hutcheson (1694–1746) and Adam Smith (1723–90)[40] on trade and commerce, exchanges of property and money, banks, loans and interest, inflation and deflation, and other economic topics.

Born in Spain, Antonio Rubio joined the Jesuits at Toledo in 1569. In 1576 he passed to Mexico where he finished his doctorate and taught philosophy for six years and theology for sixteen more years. In 1599 he returned to Spain and began publishing the work he had done in Mexico. In 1603 he published a *Logica mexicana* ("A Mexican Logic") which went through



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eighteen editions before 1641 and which contained important sections on beings of reason and the analogy of terms. He also produced studies of Aristotle's *Physics*, *De generatione et corruptione*, *De anima*, and, posthumously, *De caelo et mundo*, all of which were reprinted a number of times.

The brothers Peñafiel, Ildefonso (1594–1657) and Leonardo (1597–1657), were born in Peru, the sons of Alonso de Peñafiel, Corregidor of Quito and his wife, Doña Lorenza de Araujo. Both joined the Jesuits and were educated in Peru at Cuzco and Lima. Both of them afterwards taught at both places as Jesuits. Ildefonso authored a complete course in philosophy, the *Cursus integri philosophici*, which was first used in Peru, then published later in three volumes at Lyons (1653–5). The work showed the influence of Suárez and reflected the nominalism of Hurtado de Mendoza. Leonardo had a hand in its completion, while he himself, in addition to four highly regarded theological works, left in manuscript a commentary on the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle.

Miguel Viñas was born in Catalonia in 1642. After joining the Jesuits in 1680, he was sent to Peru and then to Chile, where he taught philosophy at the Jesuit college in Santiago. He later taught theology at the same college for nine years and was for thirteen years the rector there. Following two years in Rome as Procurator for the Chilean Jesuits, he returned to Santiago, where he died in 1718. In 1709 three volumes of the philosophy he had taught a generation earlier in Chile were published at Genoa as *Philosophia scholastica*.

Dividing his subject matter into logic, philosophy of nature, and metaphysics, Viñas treats beings of reason in a most striking way both in logic and metaphysics, making a remarkable excursion beyond transcendental terms and concepts, such as being and its properties of unity, truth, and goodness, into the area of "supertranscendentals." In opposition to Suárez, whom in most matters he regards as a mentor,[41] Viñas adopts a Scotistic position, holding that being is univocal between and among God and creatures, substance and accidents, actual and possible, and positive and negative facts.[42] At the same time, in agreement with Suárez, he denies that there is a common intrinsic concept of being between real extra-mental being and beings of reason, the paradigm case of which would be furnished by impossible objects.[43]

Viñas continues with what by then are in Hispanic philosophy two well-known divisions. The first is between transcendental terms, such as *being*, *thing*, *one*, *true* and *good*, and terms that are supertranscendental, like *intelligible* or *lovable*, which Viñas describes as applicable over the range of all that is sayable or thinkable, whether such is true or false, fictional or real, possible or impossible.[44] The second division falls between an intrinsic transcendental and an extrinsic supertranscendental intelligibility. Briefly, an intrinsic transcendental intelligibility is one that is based upon the intrinsic reality of that which is or can be. In contrast, an extrinsic



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supertranscendental intelligibility is contributed from outside such things by the intellect and is wide enough to embrace not only that which is or can be but also that which cannot be except in the wake of an intellectual operation.[45] Viñas allows for a supertranscendental common extrinsic intelligibility between beings of reason, including impossible objects, and real beings.[46] But, going further, he tackles the question of the extrinsic intelligibility of what can only be called "supertranscendental nothing." This last, which represents the least common denominator of what is objective (in the sense of intentional), is the negation not only of what is actual or what is possible, but also of what is impossible. This constitutes a kind of "philosophical Finisterre," the absolutely last redoubt of objectivity.[47] It is the lowest (in contrast to God who might be highest), outer (that is, the transalpine rather than cisalpine) side of the border of all that is thinkable or sayable.

In this Viñas, and to some degree other Hispanic scholastics, were without knowing it anticipating and even going beyond the later *Gegenstand überhaupt* and *Nichts* doctrines of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804).[48] As is well known, philosophy in the seventeenth century was marked by a shift from a medieval confidence in our ability to know things themselves toward epistemological concerns with knowing and naming. So it is noteworthy that Viñas, still in a tradition with roots in Aristotle and medieval scholasticism, is here in the van of a pre-Kantian exploration of objectivity.

## Conclusion

But it is not just Viñas who went to the ends of the earth, to the *finis terrae* which was Chile. The same exploratory daring was generally characteristic of Hispanic scholasticism in various subject areas. Space forbids elaborating the point with additional names and texts, but there are many more figures and doctrines besides those which have been treated here. But to emphasize the fact that Hispanic philosophy was not, as has often been assumed, marginal to the development of early modern philosophy, it is worth passing in review some of the themes already mentioned. Hispanic philosophy played a key role in the premodern elaboration of the law of nations and theory of just war, a debate which began in earnest with Vitoria and continued with Soto, Toletus, Molina, Suárez, and numerous others. It created the genre of the philosophical textbook – the systematic presentation, not just of metaphysics, but of other areas of philosophy – a genre which had its prototype in the *Disputationes metaphysicae* of Suárez. It integrated modern economic theory into philosophical discussion: for example, in the works of Vitoria, Soto, Mercado, Molina, as well as many more. And it laid foundations for probability theory in the wake of Fonseca and Molina's doctrine of



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"middle knowledge." Themes beyond the scope of this chapter, but also important for early modern philosophy, include new approaches to ethics such as moral casuistry and probabilism. Hispanic scholasticism was also the arena from which emerged key developments in semiotics, such as Suárez's reflections on the interpretation of law (cf. *De legibus* VI, cc. 1–7), or the reflections on linguistics of those missionaries, steeped in Hispanic scholasticism, who first made contact with written and spoken Chinese as well as with other languages.[49] Roman Catholic missionaries' experience of and comments upon the limitations of Chinese culture and language with respect to metaphysics and theology also broadened the horizons of Hispanic philosophers and theologians and forced them to restate traditional views at a higher level of generality or even revise them.[50]

Another chapter might well be written about the impact of Hispanic scholasticism on coeval and later European philosophy, especially in view of the fact that the great classical modern philosophers so often received their first training in the Latin scholastic philosophy which dominated the universities and Catholic colleges of their time and which was itself dominated by Hispanic authors and themes. To be sure, the tradition of Hispanic scholasticism itself withered eventually. Arguably this was the result of a post-Tridentine siege mentality which sapped its daring. That mentality could be coupled with an increasingly insular and defensive posture in Spain after its golden age. In the eighteenth century Spanish culture in general declined, and philosophy in particular suffered from the suppression in 1773 of the Jesuit Order. But the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of Hispanic scholasticism continued strong in other places. A single but critical example must stand for the rest: the extension to Europe and beyond of the sixteenth-century Spanish concern for individual subjective rights,[51] a conception that aimed to provide limits against what might otherwise be the total power of a state or monarch.[52] By almost any estimate, this concern for individual human rights was a major legacy to the modern world from the philosophical culture of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Iberia.

## NOTES

1. Ramirez 1955.
2. In this Vitoria was influenced by the example of Peter Crockaert, OP (*c.* 1460/70–1514), his teacher at the University of Paris who had substituted the *Summa* of Aquinas for the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard as his principal text in theology. At about the same time, or even earlier, Thomas de Vio, OP, known as Cajetan (1469–1534), had done the same thing.
3. In order, Vitoria's successors were Melchior Cano (1509–60), Domingo de Soto (1494–1560), Pedro de Sotomayor (1511–64), Juan Mancio (1497–1576), Bartolomeo de Medina (1527–80), and Domingo Banez (1528–1604).



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4. See, for example, the parallel passages of Vitoria with Grotius and Gentili listed by Luis Getino in Vitoria 1933–6, III, ix–xliii.
5. Getino 1930, 283.
6. The term *relectio* or "re-lecture" refers to the practice in which professors at Salamanca were required each year to re-present, in a two-hour lecture open to the whole university community, some topic already treated in their lecture courses.
7. Thus by the end of the sixteenth century we have other treatises *De iustitia et iure* from Pedro de Aragón, OSA, Domingo Bañez, OP, Luis de Molina, SJ, and Bartolomé Salón, OSA.
8. The basic Thomistic sources of Soto's work are: (1) Summa theologiae I–II, qq. 90–108 (on law), and (2) ibid., II–II, qq. 57–78 (on justice).
9. Gutiérrez 1993, 166–78, 519–24.
10. Later (1624–8), a *cursus complutensis* was authored by the Carmelites at the University of Alcalá.
11. Collegium Conimbricense 2001.
12. See De Backer and Sommervogel 1890–1932, II: col. 1278.
13. Giacon 1944, II: 44.
14. Ibid., 45.
15. Ibid., 46.
16. Ibid.
17. Doyle 1984.
18. See Doyle 1969.
19. See Doyle 1987–8.
20. Suárez 1612.
21. The general theme of the nature of the Amerindians as treated by Spanish scholastic theologians is treated in Pagden 1982.
22. Suárez 1613. The full title is "A Defense of the Catholic Faith against the Errors of the Anglican Sect, with a Reply to the Apology for the Oath of Fidelity and the Admonitory Preface of James, the Most Serene King of England."
23. Molina 1588.
24. A doctrine earlier introduced by Fonseca.
25. Ramelow 1997, Knebel 2000, and Schmutz 2003. For recent English-language discussion of some of this, see Franklin 2001.
26. *De iustitia* II, tr. 2, disp. 507.
27. Ibid. I, tr. 2, disps. 34–5, especially d. 35, n. 16.
28. Poinsot 1985.
29. Commenting on Aquinas' *Summa* $I^{a}$–$II^{ae}$, disp. 150, c. 3, §22.
30. Arriaga 1632.
31. Izquierdo 1659.
32. Doyle 1995.
33. For moral teaching on insurance contracts in Vitoria, Soto, Molina, and Lessius, see Bergfeld 1973.
34. Lewalter 1935, 71.
35. Doyle 1997 and 1999.
36. Goclenius 1613, 16, *in margine*.
37. Heereboord 1665, 27.
38. Morison 1956.



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39. Mercado 1569.
40. Beuchot 1996, 121.
41. Viñas 1709, I: 31, 36.
42. Ibid., III: 122–6.
43. Ibid., III: 128–31.
44. Ibid., I: 160.
45. Doyle 1990.
46. Viñas 1709, III: 126–8.
47. Doyle 1998.
48. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft, Abschnitt* §12, B113–14; and *Anhang*, A290/B347–A292/B349. Also see Doyle 1997, 2003, and 2004.
49. See Acosta 1954, 185–7 (lib. 6, cap. iv).
50. Kern 1998.
51. Folgado 1960, Doyle 2001, and Villey 1973, esp. 60–7.
52. Martínez Tapia 1998.



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# 14

MIGUEL A. GRANADA

# New visions of the cosmos

The Aristotelian representation of the universe inherited from the Middle Ages remained dominant into the second half of the sixteenth century. It is true that the fifteenth-century revival of Platonism spearheaded by Marsilio Ficino as well as the more diffuse renaissance of Stoicism had undermined certain aspects of Aristotelian cosmology, such as the nature of the heavens as quintessence, the solid and impenetrable character of the celestial spheres, and the principle of the motion of celestial bodies. Nevertheless, even these alternative philosophies all embraced the key features of the Aristotelian universe – the finiteness and sphericity of the cosmos, the heterogeneity of and hierarchy between the supralunar and sublunar worlds, and the Earth as central and unmoving – and Aristotelianism thus retained an unthreatened hegemony, especially in the universities.

This was in spite of the publication in 1543 of Copernicus' *Six Books on the Revolutions of the Celestial Spheres* (*De revolutionibus orbium coelestium libri sex*), which proposed a new calculus of planetary motion based on several new "hypotheses" (among them, heliocentrism and a mobile Earth). It also proposed a new cosmology consonant with these hypotheses and the immobility of the ultimate sphere of the universe (and therefore of the world as totality, as well). At the time, the dominant response to Copernicus' work treated it solely as an astronomical hypothesis and ignored its cosmological implications. Consequently, at least until the first adherents of Copernicus' cosmology (such as Michael Maestlin, implicitly, and Thomas Digges, explicitly) began to publish in the 1570s, the Aristotelian representation of the universe continued unchallenged.

Yet the appearance of several "celestial novelties" in the 1570s and 1580s – the nova of Cassiopeia in 1572, and the comets of 1577, 1580, 1582, and 1585 – helped to pave the way for new ideas. The recognition that these novelties occurred in the celestial regions, contradicting the Aristotelian view that they were atmospheric and sublunar phenomena, contributed to the elimination of Aristotle's theory of immutable celestial spheres. They also



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stimulated debate on the broader theological consequences of the mutability of the heavens, especially the possibility of explaining those celestial phenomena as admonitory miracles, expressions of divine omnipotence, a theory to which Reformed countries were especially drawn owing to the eschatological expectations the new phenomena aroused there.[1]

It was in this context – the seeming impregnability of the Aristotelian cosmos, coupled with the gradual emergence of new cosmological theories more or less connected with recent developments in astronomy – that a group of Italian philosophers, united only by their radical opposition to Aristotelianism, began to raise more profound questions about nature, its principles and mode of operation, and the general structure of the universe. In what follows I will examine, successively, Bernardino Telesio, Francesco Patrizi, Giordano Bruno (all of whom flourished during the second half of the sixteenth century) and Tommaso Campanella (with whom we enter the seventeenth).

## Bernardino Telesio (1509–88)

A native of Cosenza in Calabria, Telesio is the first of the three great philosophers of southern Italy, the other two being Giordano Bruno and Tommaso Campanella.[2] His corpus is rather small. It consists of a foundational treatise, published with numerous modifications and additions in three successive editions of 1565, 1570, and 1586,[3] and a series of opuscules on natural philosophy, of various dates of composition. Three of these were published in the second edition of *On the Nature of Things* (*De rerum natura*), and in 1590 Telesio's student Antonio Persio published a collection of nine under the title of *Various Short Works on Natural Phenomena* (*Varii de naturalibus rebus libelli*).[4] If Patrizi, Bruno, and Campanella ranged through disciplines such as metaphysics, theology, and political philosophy, Telesio's thought remained consciously and voluntarily confined to the orbit of natural philosophy, to which he attempted to give a new, and true, synthesis by subverting every prior attempt since the Greeks.

The title of his foundational work, *On the Nature of Things According to Their Own Principles* (*De rerum natura iuxta propria principia*), is expressive of this desire to reformulate the true natural philosophy against a tradition, especially that of Aristotelianism, which had perverted it from its very foundations. Telesio aspires, in effect, to erect the philosophy or science of nature upon the bases of:

1) natural principles themselves, independent of theology, and marginalizing in particular metaphysics, which he understood to be an abstract and unreal discipline; and



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2) sensory experience, which produces the said natural principles and, in general, all of the information pertaining to natural philosophy. For Telesio sensory experience, to which one must subordinate oneself, is the foundation that supports the a posteriori exercise of reason.

The prologue to the 1565 edition (which was omitted from successive editions)[5] and especially chapter 1.1 of the 1570 edition (which became the prologue to the third edition) offer a clear formulation of Telesio's proposal to re-found the field. Telesio places himself in opposition to scholastic Aristotelianism by substituting the humble interpretation of nature based on empirical observation for fictional worlds.

Although he is very hostile to the Peripatetic tradition, Telesio for the most part proceeds along Aristotelian lines. In order to establish the first principles of nature he reduces to an exclusively natural form the principles of change that Aristotle established in *Physics* 1.5–6 – matter as the substrate of change, form, and privation – which to him seemed excessively abstract. In their place Telesio substitutes as principles *matter* (substrate or "physical mass," *moles corporea*), which is absolutely unmoving and inactive, totally passive, uniform throughout, invisible and black; and *heat* and *cold*, which are contrary principles, incorporeal and active, which cannot exist independently of matter in the same way that matter cannot avoid being constantly modified by them. Heat and cold are locked in a perpetual struggle to occupy matter and exclude their opposite, motivated by the innate desire to conserve and expand themselves and by the perception (*sensus*) with which they consequently are endowed. Heat is the principle of movement, making the corporeal matter into which it penetrates tenuous, rarefied, and light; cold is the principle of immobility, and it renders the matter it influences dense and heavy. Because of this contrast, and in order to create a stable and permanent universe, these opposing forces must be kept at the maximal possible distance, yet in such a way that they still may act upon each other (especially heat upon cold) to maintain the natural world in a dynamic equilibrium of perpetual motion. This means – when taken together with a creative and provident divinity, the deduction of whose existence from sensory experience is, nevertheless, highly questionable and is best accepted a priori – that the universe is finite, and that the two principles are located in its two opposing regions: cold in the central, immobile Earth and heat in the peripheral, moving heavens which encircle it (*De rerum natura*, 1586, 1.1–4).

Telesio's universe is thus a variation on the finite and geocentric system of Aristotelianism. Copernicanism has not left the least impression on Telesio, failing to elicit even a negative response. Nevertheless, the traditional hierarchy of sublunar and supralunar worlds has disappeared, insofar as the



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heavens and the Earth are no longer conceived in hierarchical terms despite the distinction drawn between their opposing dominant principles. Moreover, the heavens are no longer composed of the phantasmagorical "quintessence" or ethereal element, but rather of a heat that is real, present, and disseminated fundamentally by the Sun, its universal source.[6] (In Aristotelianism, such heat is absent from the heavens, present only in the sublunar world because of the friction produced by the movement of the celestial spheres.)

Telesio retains the celestial spheres, which he considered to be solid bodies composed of the same igneous matter as the stars (though less substantial and dense, and therefore not heat-emitting). He also believed them to be the true source of celestial motion, responsible for propelling the stars (to whom Telesio ceded no more than the ability to rotate upon themselves). In his *Obiectiones* of 1572, written in response to the 1570 edition of *De rerum natura*, Francesco Patrizi would criticize Telesio on this point, insisting on the greater plausibility of fluid heavens offering no resistance to the free and spontaneous movement of the divine, celestial animals which he thought stars to be.[7]

Telesio seems to incline towards a system of homocentric spheres along the lines of the Peripatetic tradition's characteristic astronomy of homocentric spheres, though in the version associated with the Arab thinker al-Bitruji (Alpetragius in the Latin world). According to this version, all of the celestial spheres spin in the same direction (from east to west, the daily trajectory of the sphere of the fixed stars), but with a velocity that decreases as their distance from the sphere of the fixed stars grows.[8]

Telesio's celestial spheres are not impenetrable, as can be deduced from the final version of his theory of comets. Initially Telesio considered comets to be sublunar phenomena, but the observation of the nova of Cassiopeia (which was interpreted as a comet) and of the comet of 1577 led him to change his opinion. In his short work *On Comets and the Milky Way* (*De cometis et lacteo circulo*), composed around 1580, he argues for the celestial character of comets and defines the Milky Way as unusually condensed celestial matter in the sphere of the fixed stars. Comets are sublunar exhalations, to be sure, but they are elevated to the heavens (and, in the case of the nova of Cassiopeia, to the very region of the stars), where they shine in response to the Sun's illumination. Thus, Telesio offers an interpretation of these contemporary celestial novelties that is completely natural, without recourse to the miraculous intervention of God or to the eschatological overtones so frequent at the time. This theory of comets is only compatible with the existence of celestial spheres if these spheres are penetrable, a conception which Telesio necessarily had to accept.[9]



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The third edition of *De rerum natura* (1586) presents some completely new developments with regards to space (1.25–8) and time (1.29). Like Bruno in his dialogue *On the Infinite* (*De l'infinito*, London, 1584), Telesio rejects the Aristotelian conception of space and time as accidents of corporeal substance. Responding to Stoic theories and, above all, to John Philoponus' critique of the Aristotelian conception in the "Corollary on Place" (*Corollarium de loco*) in his *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics*, Telesio argues that space is "distinct from the material of the bodies it contains," conceptually anterior to them and independent, though always full of corporeal matter. Incorporeal in itself, space can be defined as a "capacity to receive bodies." It is, in addition, completely indifferent and inert with respect to matter. Consequently he abandons the notion of "natural places." Space is homogeneous: it possesses an identical character in all of its regions. Nevertheless, it is not infinite; its reach is limited to the spherical world that it must contain. Telesio's idea of space is similar to the Stoic conception, though he rejects the existence of an infinite extra-cosmic void. Similarly, time is independent of the objects which exist within it and of their movements; "it exists for itself" and must be understood as independent of the motion that constantly occurs within it.

Telesio's conception of space and time (the latter, without a doubt, rather less developed) constitutes a very important moment in the dissolution of the Aristotelian synthesis, and contributed to the establishment of the modern concept of infinite, homogeneous, and absolute space and time – crucial developments for the affirmation of modern physics.[10]

Some of Telesio's innovations, however, were seen as theologically dangerous. In a 1570 letter to the archbishop of Cosenza, Telesio referred to attacks leveled against the first edition of *De rerum natura* for its heterodox rejection of a separate intelligence behind the movement of the celestial spheres (for him, they are self-propelled) and, above all, for its conception of the animal and human soul as a *spiritus* "educed from the seed" (*e semine eductus*) and necessarily mortal.[11] This last difficulty, much the gravest, led Telesio to introduce into the second and especially the third editions a second soul in man "infused by God" (*infusa a Deo*) and immortal, which would account for the human aspiration to immortality (this against the purely mechanistic dynamic of the *spiritus*, moved exclusively by the impulse of self-preservation in the context of its worldly interactions with other organisms).[12]

*De rerum natura* was included on the *Index of Prohibited Books* published in Rome in 1596, with the clause *donec expurgetur*, "until it shall be purged [of error]." This condemnation reflected the general climate of doctrinal hardening that had filtered down across Italy for several years and which also affected Patrizi, Bruno, and Campanella.[13] The required expurgation, requested in 1601 by Telesio's relatives, was finally abandoned as "impossible."



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## Francesco Patrizi (1529–97)

Patrizi was born in Cherso, in the extreme northeast of Italy. He studied at the University of Padua, where in due course he became familiar with the Aristotelianism dominant at the time. His reading of Marsilio Ficino's *Platonic Theology on the Immortality of Rational Souls* (*Platonica theologia de immortalitate animorum*, 1482) converted him to Platonism and the *prisca theologia*, to which he would remain faithful for the rest of his life. The metaphysical and theological dimension of Ficino's Platonism, its aspirations to overcome the crisis of contemporary Christianity – all of which Patrizi preserved and applied to his contemporary situation – permit us to intuit a program profoundly different from that of Telesio. Patrizi also aspires to re-found natural philosophy *sans* Aristotle. However, while Telesio was satisfied to take a narrow view of his project, confining it to the realm of natural philosophy, for Patrizi metaphysics and theology are fundamental components of his whole system, and reveal the ontological principles from which natural philosophy is derived. All of these disciplines appear in the final and most important of Patrizi's works, the *Nova de universis philosophia*.

The breadth of Patrizi's interests is also clear from his other works, represented by his *Peripatetic Discussions* (*Discussiones peripateticae*).[14] An implacable critique of Aristotle, this work is intimately related to Patrizi's elaboration of his own philosophical system in the *New Philosophy of the Universe* (*Nova de universis philosophia*). Aligning himself with the humanist critique of Aristotle descending from Petrarca, Lorenzo Valla, and Gianfrancesco Pico, Patrizi destroys the image of perfection which the Peripatetic tradition had bestowed upon Aristotle and his work. The Stagirite appears as the plagiarist of an earlier philosophical tradition, which he nevertheless systematically deforms and misinterprets in order to establish his own hegemony. In proof of his contention, Patrizi resorts to a detailed philological and historical investigation in order to show that the scientific system so praised by Aristotle's followers does not exist. Aristotle has destroyed, affirms Patrizi, the tradition of true wisdom that Chaldaea and Egypt produced, Orpheus carried to Greece, and the Presocratics elaborated before Plato perfected it – i.e. the tradition of the *prisca theologia*. Aristotle established his own dominance via sophistic knowledge, alien to the reality of things and devoted to verbal repetition and textual commentaries.[15] The *Discussiones peripateticae* would constitute the premise and justification of the program, fulfilled in the *Nova de universis philosophia*, to restore the original wisdom that Aristotle destroyed.

A professor of Platonic philosophy at Ferrara since 1578, Patrizi published there in 1591 his most important work, the *Nova de universis philosophia*.



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The subtitle ("In which, by means of the Aristotelian method one ascends to the first cause, not through motion, but rather through light and luminous bodies; now, with Patrizi's own method, the entire Divinity offers itself to be contemplated, and finally the totality of things is deduced, by means of the Platonic method, from God the Creator") revealed a program in which natural philosophy and cosmology were connected with their metaphysical and theological foundations by means of the inductive and deductive methods. This program responded faithfully to the agenda of restoring the *prisca theologia*, underway since Ficino, and to the critique of Aristotle. At the same time, it showed itself to be profoundly different from Telesio's project, which was limited solely to the sphere of nature "according to its own principles."

In his dedicatory letter to the pope, Patrizi insisted on the impiety of Aristotelianism and, therefore, its radical incompatibility with Christianity. It was Aristotelianism that was responsible for the religious crisis of recent centuries and the Protestant secession. As a remedy and strategy for the recovery of religious unity under Roman authority, Patrizi proposed a return to the ancient philosophy that, "consonant with the Catholic faith," one could find renewed in his present work.

The *Nova de universis philosophia* consisted of four parts:

1) *Panaugia* ("All-Splendor," in ten books), which expounded, in the tradition of Platonic light metaphysics, a theory of light in its two planes (sensible and suprasensible) and of the Divinity as the "source and father of light."
2) *Panarchia* ("All-Principle," in twenty-two books), which expounded a complete doctrine of the degrees of being descending from the absolute principle, the triune God, to the body.
3) *Pampsychia* ("All-Soul," in five books), in which Patrizi presented a theory of the soul as an intermediate degree of being, as well as a theory of universal animation.
4) *Pancosmia* ("All-World," in thirty-two books), the most original and important part, in which Patrizi explains his cosmology and the relation of the universe to the Divinity.

In accordance with the Platonic "principle of plenitude" Patrizi's universe is a necessary and infinite creation or production of God, whose infinite goodness and power cannot remain inactive, but rather must manifest themselves in an actually infinite universe.[16] This infinite universe does not share the characteristics of the one Giordano Bruno had been elaborating since 1584: a homogeneous infinite universe of Epicurean hue, containing a plurality of worlds. Instead, Patrizi renovates the Stoic and Platonic universe: a finite world, unique and geocentric, located at the center of an infinite space – a



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space that is, nevertheless, not otherwise empty, as in Stoicism, but rather Platonically full of supracelestial light, "simultaneously incorporeal and corporeal." This infinite region receives the traditional name of the Empyreum.[17]

This finite, unique, geocentric world is organized into a bipartite hierarchy of celestial and sublunar worlds. Patrizi, nevertheless, eliminates the celestial spheres and conceives of a fluid ethereal sky, a visible and discrete "ardor" in contrast with the invisible and continuous Empyreum (*Pancosmia*, IX.85c–d), through which the igneous celestial bodies, like *animales* or living beings, move freely in accordance with the impulses of their own intelligent souls. These souls are coordinated with the universal intellect, which results in a universal order. Nor does there exist an ultimate sphere of the stars to transport them by its daily motion. Patrizi places the stars at varying heights and doubts that the tremendous velocity required for their daily displacement is possible, at least for the most elevated. Yet since their divine and animated character mandates that they be in motion, the stars must move by themselves. Their souls dictate that they do so with a more moderate speed, however, in equilibrium with the Earth's contrary rotation at the center of the world. Ultimately, Patrizi is not completely consistent on the question of whether the region of the stars (and thus of the finite world), in the interior of the infinite Empyreum, is bounded by a defined spherical surface.[18]

In spite of its innovations, Patrizi's universe preserves a markedly traditional character: a single, Earth-centered planetary system, with its peripheral stellar cohort, is the only existing world. This world is located in the interior of the infinite Empyreum, and everything is characterized by a pronounced heterogeneity and organized into a hierarchy reaching from the inferior Earth up to the infinite Empyreum, full of light, which is the level closest to God. This hierarchy is not challenged by the fact that the four elements constituting the universe (space, light, heat and humidity or *fluor*, with light and heat as the active principles and *fluor* the passive material endowed with resistance) are found everywhere throughout the universe. With the exception of homogeneous space, the remaining elements form combinations of increasing density, indicating their progressively increasing distance from the primordial, divine source and, therefore, their increasing materiality.

Patrizi also significantly refines Telesio's conception of homogeneous and independent space. The first book of the *Pancosmia* ("De spacio physico") explains its properties: it is the first divine creation, an infinite receptacle in three dimensions, penetrable without resistance, and likewise able to penetrate bodies. Space is "an incorporeal body and a corporeal non-body," a continuous "hypostatic extension" (*Pancosmia*, I.65b) absolutely unmoving, to which the categories of substance and accident do not apply. Its total



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homogeneity is independent of the cosmological distinction between the light that fills it infinitely in the Empyreum and the single world housed in its "center," at the furthest possible distance from the divine principle. Independently of his cosmology, Pierre Gassendi and Henry More would later adopt Patrizi's concept of space, which thus indirectly came to influence Newton.[19]

In 1592 Patrizi was called to Rome to fill the professorship of Platonic philosophy at La Sapienza. It appeared that his program was on the way to acceptance. However, in November of that year the *Nova de universis philosophia* was denounced before the Congregation of the Index. Patrizi's attempts to defend and modify his work, in which he persisted until his death in 1597, were ineffective: it was condemned definitively in 1594, and prohibited in the *Index* of 1596. This condemnation reflects the hostility of the ecclesiastical institutions committed to supporting Aristotelian theology – especially the Society of Jesus – to Patrizi's program.[20]

## Giordano Bruno (1548–1600)

Born in Nola, near Naples, Bruno's education – appropriate to a Dominican friar – focused initially on philosophy and theology in the scholastic tradition. Problems with his discipline and orthodoxy led to his exile in 1578. Until 1591 Bruno wandered through France, England, and Germany, writing and publishing a vast corpus. In 1591 he returned to his native Italy, to Venice, where he was denounced to the Inquisition in the following year. The inquisitorial trial, begun in Venice, continued in Rome and concluded in his condemnation, as a result of which he was burned alive on 17 February 1600.[21]

The fundamentals of Bruno's conception of nature are expounded in the first three Italian philosophical dialogues that he published in London in 1584, *The Ash Wednesday Supper*; *On the Cause, the Principle and the One*; and *On the Infinite, the Universe and the Worlds* (*La cena de le Ceneri*; *De la causa, principio e uno*; *De l' infinito, universo e mondi*).[22] Subsequent Latin works rounded out his physics and cosmology on various points. Among them stand out *The Discourse in the College of Cambrai* (*Camoeracensis acrotismus*, Wittenberg, 1588), *On the Triple Minimum and Measure* (*De triplici minimo et mensura*, Frankfurt, 1591) and above all *On the Immense and the Innumerables* (*De immenso et innumerabilibus*, Frankfurt, 1591), which contains the fullest expression of his cosmological ideas.

Bruno is the only sixteenth-century philosopher who adhered to Copernicus' cosmology. For him, Copernicus is the "dawn" that announces the return of the ancient wisdom that Aristotle had displaced in the "wheel of time" by imposing a pseudo-philosophy based on a geocentric universe and unmoving Earth.



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Thus, the scientific justification for Bruno's commitment to the return of the *prisca sapientia* at Aristotle's expense appears quite distinct from Patrizi's.

But Bruno did not limit himself merely to accepting the truth of the Copernican cosmos; he further developed it, arriving ultimately at a clear affirmation of a universe that was (1) infinite in act, and (2) homogeneous, as much in its spatial as in its temporal extension. That is to say, Bruno's universe has the same composition throughout and obeys the same laws throughout the entirety of its infinite spatial and temporal extension. Bruno thus abandons the spatial heterogeneity and hierarchy still present in Patrizi's formulation and excludes any sort of apocalyptic and eschatological "end of the world," in opposition to contemporary Christian expectations of the imminent second coming of Christ and the subsequent "Last Judgment."[23] For Bruno, the universe is also (3) necessarily infinite, insofar as it is the consummate production of the infinite power-goodness-will of the Divinity, which could not but create an infinite and eternal universe consonant with all of its infinite power, identical to itself.[24]

This infinite and homogeneous universe, which contains the totality of Being, contains an infinity of worlds: filled to its capacity, the universe consists of an infinite repetition of what Bruno designates *synodi ex mundis* and which we might translate as "solar systems," since each *synodus* consists of a central sun-star and a greater or smaller number of earth-planets orbiting it, as well as a number of comets (which Bruno considered to be a variety or species of planet) also in periodic motion around the star. What we have here is a novel, strange, and revolutionary development of Copernicanism, formulated between 1584 and 1591, with decisive connections to and implications for the fields of theology and anthropology. It is no surprise that it would play a significant role in Bruno's inquisitorial condemnation, as well as in his ultimate decision not to recant and to face death as a philosopher.[25]

Every body in the universe is formed of the four omnipresent elements: fire, air, water, and earth. These bodies are differentiated into sun-stars and planets (or comets) according to their elemental composition: when fire predominates, we have a sun-star that shines of its own accord; when earth and water predominate, we have an opaque planet that shines only by reflecting the light of its sun-star. Every star is in constant motion, impelled by its own intelligent soul (that is to say, without need of any external intelligent mover). The same is true of the sun-stars, which rotate and orbit in circles at the center of their own planetary systems. Since the presence of celestial spheres would be nonsensical in this infinite universe, they are eliminated, and the stars move at the behest of their own souls within a fluid space filled exclusively by pure air or ether.

At the same time, Bruno's planets and suns cannot exist independently of each other. Planets need a sun from which to derive, via their rotational and



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translational movement, the heat and light that permit the reproduction of animal life (a phenomenon which takes place equally on Earth and on other planets).[26] Suns likewise require the moist exhalations of the planets in order to reproduce their fire.[27] Thus the *synodi ex mundis* are the elemental and self-sufficient structures of the universe. The pattern of their dispersion, on the other hand – each system centered on a unique sun-star and separated from neighboring systems by enormous distances – corresponds to Divine Providence immanent in the universe. Only in this way is life possible.

Bruno's conception of the arrangement of our planetary system breaks with the basic structural principle of Copernicanism. Copernicanism was predicated upon the existence of an absolute and immobile center and periphery (the Sun and the sphere of the fixed stars, respectively), with some mobile bodies – the planets – arranged in accordance with the law of proportion between period and distance from the center. Bruno eliminates all notion of an absolute center and periphery in his conception of the universe, "whose center is in every part and periphery nowhere." Moreover, he conceives of the Sun as being endowed with the same capacity for movement as any other star. With reference to intermediate bodies, Bruno not only includes comets as a variety of planet in motion around the Sun; he also abandons the law of proportion between distance and periodic movement, such that the Earth, the Moon, Mercury, and Venus spin on the same deferent and the superior planets are endowed with "consort" planets still undiscovered.[28]

This conception of an infinite and homogeneous universe as "All-One" implied an indifferent immanence on the part of the Divinity, against Patrizi's representation of a particular divine seat in the infinite Empyreum standing outside of the unique planetary system and, of course, of the Earth. Bruno also denies the Christian transcendence of the Divinity and the conventional representation of heaven as transcending the physical universe, a realm in which the angelic intelligences and those destined for salvation enjoy eternal union with God. In Bruno, because the infinite universe is the portrait or image of God and includes everything that exists, Paradise and union with God are also reduced to immanence.[29] It should not therefore be surprising that certain expressions of Christian theology like "the Heaven of Heaven" (*caelum caeli*) and "the Heaven of the Heavens" (*caelum caelorum*), which traditionally signify the angelic intelligences, an otherworldly Paradise, or the intimate presence of the Divine Trinity itself, in Bruno come to signify the space occupied by each planetary system (in the first instance) and infinite space itself (in the second):

> There are as many heavens as stars, if by heavens we understand the contiguous and configured space of each one, just as we call the heaven of the Earth not



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> only the space which it occupies, but also the space which surrounds it, distinct from the space which surrounds the Moon and the other terrestrial bodies nearby. The heaven of the heaven is the space belonging to each system, such as that in which our sun and its planets are found. The heaven of the heavens and maximum and immense space . . . is also called ether, because it is transitable in its totality and because all things burn in it . . . But the seat of God is the universe, entirely in all its parts, measureless heaven, empty space which He fills (*De immenso*, IV.14).

A necessary and complete expression of the infinite divine unity, the infinite universe is itself a "unity." The dialogue *De la causa* explains the metaphysical nature of the infinite universe as a rigorous ontological monism: the universe is a unique substance, whose constitutive principles – matter and form (or intelligent soul), potency and act – coincide, just as God is (as in Cusanus) the coincidence of infinite potency and act. Accordingly, individual beings are simple "accidents," transitory "forms" or "modes" of the sole infinite substance. Death does not exist, but rather becomes "mutation" or "metamorphosis" in the heart of infinite nature.

If this ontological monism foreshadows in many respects the philosophy of Spinoza, the sum of Bruno's thought demonstrated a profound incompatibility with and radical distancing from Christianity. Bruno's tragic fate was the logical consequence.[30]

## Tommaso Campanella (1568–1639)

Campanella – born in Calabria – also entered the Dominican Order. He quickly developed a profound distaste for Aristotelian philosophy, which he accused of substituting arbitrary dogma, foreign to the reality of things, for patient reading of the "Book of Nature." His reading of Telesio's *De rerum natura* validated his search for a philosophy based upon the direct observation of nature. His first published work, *Philosophy Demonstrated by the Senses* (*Philosophia sensibus demonstrata*, Naples, 1591), was an apology for Telesio and developed a Telesian system of natural philosophy: a finite universe, the product of the action of the two active principles (heat and cold) on the physical mass of passive matter, is located in a finite space created by God and whose characteristics coincide fundamentally with Telesio's space.[31] Heat and cold, locked in a permanent conflict for self-preservation, configure two opposing regions: the peripheral heavens, rotating ceaselessly of their own accord, and the central, immobile Earth. Departing from Telesio, Campanella excludes the celestial spheres and makes the stars self-moving, though he nevertheless retains the concept of a single planetary motion derived from Telesio. Heat and cold, as well as all of the organisms and



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bodies engendered by them, possess sensibility (*sensus*); Campanella would develop this final concept further in *On the Sense in Things and on Magic (De sensu rerum et magia*), composed in 1604.

Nevertheless, Campanella abandons Telesio's exclusively naturalist perspective to root *physiologia* in a metaphysical and theological discourse that basically hearkens back to Platonism, and especially to Campanella's reading of Ficino. This need to root physics in higher principles that ultimately connect back to God would be a permanent feature of Campanella's thought and would condition – in accordance with his conception of the relationship between Divine Providence and the processes of nature – his future attitude towards Galileo's new science. For the moment, the adoption of Platonic principles permitted him to justify, with greater plausibility than Telesio could muster, the existence in man of an immortal soul *infusa a Deo* that goes beyond Telesio's corporeal *spiritus*. It also justified the existence of a transcendent world soul (a notion completely foreign to Telesio) that regulates the action of heat and cold in accordance with Divine Providence.[32]

Campanella's corpus from its very first work demonstrates a consistent dedication to natural philosophy in spite of the difficult conditions under which he had to develop his thought – the successive inquisitorial trials, the repeated confiscations of his manuscripts that frequently obligated him to rewrite his works, and the perpetual prison term to which he was sentenced for promoting the failed anti-Spanish Calabrian conspiracy of 1599. Campanella had been convinced by the contemporary appearance of multiple celestial novelties that the religious and political "renovation" of the world was imminent, and that Providence had selected him to play an exceptional role as its prophet and new legislator.[33]

Having saved himself from execution by feigning madness, Campanella was held under varying degrees of duress in Neapolitan prisons until 1626, when he obtained a transfer to Rome. Years later, in the dedicatory epistle to the *Philosophia realis* (Paris, 1637), Campanella attributed the course of his life to Divine Providence, which "desired that I be imprisoned for the amount of time necessary to re-found all of the sciences that, always through divine inspiration, I have conceived in my mind." The *Physiologia*, accompanied by sixty-one voluminous *Physiological Questions* (*Quaestiones physiologicae*), was an integral part of this effort. Together with the *Metaphysica* of 1638, it is the culmination of all his prior work in the field of natural philosophy, which includes the *Great Epilogue* (*Epilogo magno*), composed in Italian prior to the failed conspiracy, the *Prophetic Articles* (*Articuli prophetales*), composed shortly after 1600 and subjected to frequent revisions and expansions, and the *Apology for Galileo* (*Apologia pro Galilaeo*), written in early



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1616 in an unsuccessful attempt to prevent the condemnation of Copernican cosmology.

During his years of "re-founding" the sciences Campanella had the opportunity to compare his Telesian physics and cosmology with the "new heavens" disclosed by Galileo's telescope and with the latest cosmological hypotheses. His reading of Tycho Brahe's *Exercises for the Restoration of Astronomy* (*Astronomiae instauratae progymnasmata*) in 1611 provided him with a number of empirical refutations of Aristotelianism, though he ultimately rejected important components of Brahe's theory of comets on the basis of observations of the comets of 1618. While he recognized the celestial location of comets, he refused to accept either that they were produced by ethereal celestial matter or that they followed a regular trajectory throughout the whole of their existence. Instead Campanella partially retained Telesio's and Galileo's conception of comets as vapors elevated to the heavens and illuminated by the Sun. He argued that the vapors which form comets proceed from the planets, whose elemental composition can be deduced according to him from telescopic observation.

Occasionally Campanella appears to adapt his convictions to Brahe's geoheliocentric system, in which "all of the planets move with the sun around the Earth, the focus of their hatred, in order to incinerate it, and in this war the sun is the head; at the same time all of the planets move around the sun, the center of their love."[34] But it was the Copernican cosmology of Bruno and Galileo, and Bruno's proposal of an infinite universe with an infinite plurality of planetary systems spinning around their sun-stars, that the new heavens of the telescope seemed to endorse. This proved a challenge to Campanella. In several writings he contemplated incorporating Copernicanism into his physics and cosmology, coming to the conclusion that it would be possible with only slight modifications. However, there is insufficient evidence to affirm that he ever passed over to the Copernican camp. The *Apologia pro Galilaeo* (which Campanella actually entitled *Disputatio*) never aimed to support Copernicanism, but rather to defend *libertas philosophandi* and the Galilean mode of philosophizing as being more consonant with Scripture than was Aristotelianism.

All of the evidence seems to indicate that Campanella's Telesian cosmology and physics remained as robust at the end of his life as they were in 1591, modified only in their details. He energetically rejected the infinity of the universe in order to protect the ontological difference between Creator and created, which would disappear if God had imparted his infinity to the universe. On the other hand, Campanella could accept as a possibility the plurality of planetary systems around stars (in accordance with a long tradition of Christian theology), although for him its cosmological plausibility is



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conditional upon these multiple worlds forming a system "beneath one great circle" (*sub uno circulo magno*), that is, enclosed within an ultimate sphere that unifies them under the purely intellectual "angelic world." Campanella, then, cannot accept Bruno's vision of an infinite reiteration of planetary systems separated by vast swaths of empty space and lacking a higher unitary principle, because it presupposes the atomistic impiety of a universe subject to fortune.

Nor did Campanella accept the concept of a Sun formed by the four elements. Rather, he maintained that it was composed of pure fire and that its light was of incorporeal character. Hence he also had to reject Bruno's hypothesis (to which Galileo inclined in regard to sunspots) that the Sun was nourished by the moist exhalations of the planets. Campanella also strongly resisted the cosmological homogenization and consequent promotion of the Earth to the level of celestial body, as it was difficult to reconcile this conception with Telesio's view that Earth and heaven were the seats of mutually opposing principles. In a poetic composition, he describes the black Earth, in accordance with the dualistic tradition and in opposition to Bruno, as the "prison of the demons and the souls; and for that reason God made it without light" ("carcere de' demoni e dell' anime; e non fu fatta da Dio lucente per tal fine").

Campanella's opposition to these new cosmological developments is not traceable solely to his Telesianism, however. It is also the result of a unique and important component of his own cosmology. Telesio, Brahe, Bruno, and Galileo all embraced (though not without some variations) the principle that nature is a stable structure subordinated to permanent laws, a tradition inherited from Greek philosophy. For them, nature's stability was exemplified perfectly in the immutable laws and periodicity of celestial motion. This principle was also present in Copernicus' thought and, according to Campanella, lay behind his heliocentrism. Copernicus, in effect, must have formulated the centrality of the Sun and the movement of the Earth as the best way to explain the regular periodicity of phenomena like the precession of the equinoxes, the diminution of the obliquity of the elliptic, or the progressive diminution of solar eccentricity.

In contrast, Campanella conceived of these and other phenomena (such as the novas of 1572 and 1604 and the repeated appearance of comets between 1577 and 1618) as innovations, new events in a cosmos whose structure was defined not by identity and repetition – the eternal world of the Greeks and impious Aristotle – but rather by progressive evolution towards an ultimate end, already near, in which the Earth would be consumed by fire as a consequence of the Sun's ineluctable approach. This was the world of Christian eschatology: "signs in the sun, the moon and the stars," according to Luke



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21:25. Divine Providence was proclaiming to men the imminent end of the world via the contemporary signs in the heavens.

It was in relation to this eschatological cosmology, and the prophecies of a religious and political "renovation" of the world in anticipation of the final conflagration, that Campanella had organized the failed conspiracy of 1599. It is this "evolutionary" cosmology that Campanella sustains in the *Articuli prophetales*. He tried in vain to attract Galileo to it, and reaffirmed it in both a tractate directed to Pope Paul V upon the appearance of the comets of 1618,[35] and the *Eclogue* with which he greeted the birth of the dauphin of France in 1638. In contrast with Bruno, Campanella believed that a new heaven and Earth truly were being produced, in accordance with the prophecy of the Apocalypse, in order to signal the imminent fulfillment of Christian eschatology.

## Conclusion

Though initially and fundamentally a mathematician, Galileo (1564–1642) would earn, through his telescopic discoveries of 1609–10, the title "mathematician and philosopher" and would contribute decisively to the triumph of the Copernican image of the world and the establishment of a new understanding of nature and of its mode of operation. This understanding would be, notwithstanding, profoundly different from that of the "natural philosophers" who came before, whether Peripatetics or *novatores*, advocates of "new philosophies." It is the understanding that is at the root of the modern mathematical science of motion. To this new science corresponds the parallel transformation of philosophy (both in method and content) in the work of Descartes and his followers and critics in the modern age. Notwithstanding this, these Italian philosophers contributed greatly, beyond their personal positive achievements, to the dissolution of the Aristotelian view of the cosmos and in general to the emancipation from the Aristotelian categories and authority.

(Translated by Adam Beaver)

## NOTES

1. Lerner 1997.
2. De Franco 1995, ch. 1.
3. Telesio 1565, 1570, 1586.
4. Republished in Telesio 1981 with other unpublished treatises and materials.
5. This prologue is included in Telesio 1965–76, 1: 669–76.
6. Lerner 1990.
7. Patrizi's *Obiectiones* and Telesio's *Solutiones* remained unpublished in his time. They have been published in Telesio 1981, 463–74 and 453–63.



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8. *De rerum natura*, Telesio 1965–76, I: 9–10; Lerner 1990, 95f.
9. Lerner 1990, 99ff. On the debate surrounding the "hardness" and impenetrability of the spheres, see Grant 1994, 324–70 (where, however, Telesio is not mentioned).
10. Schuhmann 1988 (on time); Schuhmann 1992, Grant 1981, 192–4 (on space).
11. The letter is published in De Franco 1995, 66ff.
12. De Franco 1995 and Bondì 1997 offer two very different interpretations of the origin and function of this immortal soul.
13. Rotondò 1982.
14. Patrizi 1571, 1581.
15. Vasoli 1989, 149–79.
16. Granada 2000, 110–15.
17. Patrizi 1591, *Pancosmia*, VII.
18. Lerner 1997, 104–8; Rossi 1977, 109–47.
19. Henry 1979, Grant 1981, 199–206. There exists an English version of *De spacio physico* in Brickman 1943.
20. Rotondò 1982, 33–50; Patrizi 1993; Granada 2000, 124–8; Hankins 2005a.
21. Ricci 2000.
22. These dialogues, entitled "cosmological," together with the three "moral" dialogues (*Spaccio de la bestia triunfante*, 1584; *Cabala del cavallo pegaseo* and *De gli eroici furori*, both from 1585), form a unitary work in which philosophy is defended as an autonomous form of seeking and obtaining union with the Divinity, through the understanding of nature, on the part of a superior human personality. Religion is characterized as an instrument for the moralization and political articulation of the masses. Granada 2005.
23. Granada 1997a.
24. Bruno thus followed the logic of the "principle of plenitude" against the scholastic distinction between the *potentia absoluta* and *potentia ordinata* of God. See Granada 1994, 2000, 2003.
25. Granada 1999.
26. Hence the abolition of the traditional distinction between the sublunar, terrestrial world and the celestial world. Consequently Bruno interprets the biblical prophecy of "new heavens and a new earth" (Apocalypse 21:1) not as presaging an actual cosmic innovation at the end of time, but rather as "cosmo-logical," that is to say, presaging the recovery of the true heaven and the true Earth.
27. Granada 1997b. In general Michel 1973.
28. Westman 1977, 32–4 and Bruno (forthcoming).
29. Paradise and union with God are achieved by the philosophical contemplation of infinite nature carried to its culmination; in parallel, Hell consists of alienation from God and in vice, which pertain to the state of ignorance. Granada 2005, ch. 1.
30. Firpo 1993; Granada 1999.
31. Grant 1981, 194–9.
32. *De sensu rerum et magia*, II, 25 (immortal soul in man) and 32 (world soul). Campanella 1925.
33. Headley 1997, Malcolm 2004.
34. *Physiologiae compendium* (*c.* 1620), X, 7–8. Campanella 1999.
35. Ernst and Salvetti Firpo 1996. On Campanella's evolutionary cosmology, see Lerner 1987 and 2006; on his response to Bruno and Galileo, Lerner 1995 and 2003.



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# 15

ANN M. BLAIR

# Organizations of knowledge

The "organization of knowledge" is a large and diffuse topic which can be studied at many different levels, ranging from the way an individual orders his or her understanding of the world privately or in publications, to the ways in which communities or institutions order knowledge, notably in pedagogical curricula and textbooks, professional structures, libraries and library catalogs, and other collective projects.[1] Although a few modern philosophers have addressed the problem of classifying knowledge, current practices of classification are mostly studied by anthropologists and sociologists.[2] Modern cultures and subcultures engage in both explicit and tacit classifications of knowledge, but today any particular organization of knowledge is generally acknowledged to involve a number of arbitrary choices and its success is often measured by pragmatic criteria of effectiveness, such as ease of use and economic efficiency. But this skeptical attitude toward the possibility of any organization matching the reality of knowledge or of the world is a fairly modern development, articulated for example in Jean Le Rond d'Alembert's "preliminary discourse" to the *Encyclopédie* of 1751.[3]

In Renaissance Europe, on the contrary, many thinkers harbored the ambition of implementing the perfect organization of knowledge, though pragmatic, notably alphabetical, arrangements were also widespread in certain contexts. During the Renaissance the difficulty of ordering knowledge was greatly exacerbated in almost every field by the massive influx of material to be included, stemming from newly discovered worlds and newly recovered ancient texts as well as newly printed texts of all kinds, and by concurrent social and cultural changes associated with the development of printing, a rapid growth in higher education, and shifting patterns of patronage and social mobility. In this brief introduction to a complex topic I will focus on three areas in which Renaissance authors engaged in the organization of knowledge, proceeding from the least to the most pragmatic kinds of organization: explicit discussions of the classification of the disciplines; attempts at ordering historical and natural historical knowledge, especially



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in large-scale compilations; and the organization of things of various kinds, especially books in libraries, sales catalogs, and bibliographies.

## Classification of the disciplines

Of the different forms of the organization of knowledge, the classification of the disciplines has received the most attention from intellectual historians and historians of philosophy, with a special focus on the numerous medieval treatises devoted to the question and various specific studies pertaining to Renaissance and later classifications.[4] In discussing in a few passages the parts of philosophy Aristotle canonized the topic of classification for philosophical discussion for centuries to come, although he did not devote as much attention to the question as later commentators made it seem. Aristotle became known for a bipartite division of philosophy into speculative and practical branches. In a number of passages Aristotle proposed a tripartite division with an additional third branch for "poetic" or productive knowledge, but commentators on Aristotle generally subsumed the productive under the practical disciplines. In the bipartite division ascribed to Aristotle the theoretical disciplines comprised metaphysics, physics, and mathematics, and the practical ones ethics, politics, and economics; logic and rhetoric were not properly part of philosophy, but preparatory to it.[5] But ancient philosophy also bequeathed to later commentators an alternative division of philosophy – a tripartite scheme in which philosophy was divided into logic/dialectic, ethics, and physics (including a relatively important status for mathematics). This tripartite classification of the sciences was traditionally associated with Plato in what is now recognized as a false attribution (made by Sextus Empiricus and Augustine among others) of a scheme devised by the Stoics.[6]

While these classifications remained abstract, Roman educational practice established a long-lived division of the disciplines into the seven liberal arts considered preparatory to philosophy: grammar, rhetoric and dialectic on the one hand, later known as the "trivium," and arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy on the other, forming the "quadrivium." Varro is credited with the first enumeration of the seven liberal arts, to which he added medicine and architecture, in his lost work, *Disciplinarum libri IX* (*c.* 116–27 BCE). Clement of Alexandria and Augustine among other Church Fathers hailed the seven liberal arts as preparation for Christian doctrine, thus authorizing their central place in the medieval curriculum.[7] But Greek philosophy became increasingly inaccessible to the Latin West except through the Latin summaries and commentaries of Boethius and Augustine among others. Boethius (480–524 CE) offered a classification of philosophy which synthesized the "Platonic"/Stoic within the bipartite Aristotelian scheme, including the



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quadrivium under theoretical philosophy. Boethius' classification proved particularly influential since it was adopted by Cassiodorus and mentioned by Isidore of Seville (alongside an alternative tripartite scheme) in their widely used manuals for the instruction of monks and priests respectively. Throughout the early Middle Ages educators and encyclopedists proposed a number of different classifications of the disciplines, featuring especially tripartite and bipartite divisions and the seven liberal arts.[8] The *Didascalicon* of Hugh of St. Victor (1096–1141) marks the height of complexity of medieval classification prior to the recovery of Aristotelian philosophy. His division was quadripartite (theoretical, practical, mechanical, and logical) and featured seven mechanical arts to match the seven liberal ones.[9]

The translation into Latin for the first time of many texts of Aristotelian philosophy, from Arabic and directly from Greek in some cases, triggered the expansion of teaching beyond the seven liberal arts. Since logic had already been included in liberal arts teaching (as a branch of the trivium), the new disciplines which were added to the curriculum at the newly founded universities were the three philosophies (physics, metaphysics, and ethics), themselves considered propaedeutic to study in the higher faculties of medicine, law, and theology. The recovery of Greek philosophy, accompanied by Arabic commentaries on it, coincided with the heyday of Latin treatises on the nature and division of the sciences, 1170–1270.[10] This classificatory activity can be understood as a response to the new texts, disciplines, methods, and institutions introduced in the teaching of philosophy in this period. The new texts translated into Latin also included an Arabic classification of the sciences by al-Farabi which inspired two Latin translations and a number of commentaries.[11] By 1255 Vincent of Beauvais could thus enumerate without deciding among them eight different positions on the classification of the sciences in his *Speculum doctrinale*.[12]

The more substantial treatments of Aristotelian philosophy which were now possible fostered new debates about classification, notably debates about the proper position of mathematics and the *scientiae mediae* which would recur in the Renaissance. Following Aristotle, most medieval classifications ranked the parts of philosophy according to their level of abstraction. Physics abstracted from individual material entities to discuss the forms and substances of material objects in general and thus promised *scientia* or certain knowledge; metaphysics concerned objects which were not dependent on matter at all and was thus clearly superior. Despite the abstract nature of its focus on the numerical relations between things, mathematics was considered inferior to physics because it did not adequately account for the complexity of physical reality. While many scholastics shared this assessment, a small set of disciplines which Aristotle had called "subordinate"



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blossomed into a new category of "scientiae mediae" – intermediate between physics and mathematics because partaking of both – which increasingly challenged the sharp division and hierarchy between the two parent fields.[13] Optics, the science of weights, the measurement of bodies (stereometry) and physical astronomy increasingly became objects of study at the medieval university (in part due to the translation of Arabic texts in these fields). A few scholastics, notably at Merton College in fourteenth-century Oxford, argued especially for their importance.[14]

The explicit discussion of the classification of the disciplines in the Middle Ages remained a part of theoretical philosophy, generating a few full-blown treatises and more commonly (especially after the thirteenth century) remarks in introductory sections to philosophical treatises. These discussions generally had little impact on what was taught or studied, but served as an opportunity for authors to position themselves and to innovate within the spectrum of options that developed from the engagement of successive generations with ancient classification schemes. Renaissance treatments of classification drew heavily on models and methods inherited from the Middle Ages, although this debt was often not acknowledged. On problems of classification the recovery of lost ancient texts played a comparatively minor role in the development of Renaissance thought.[15] Most Renaissance classifications of the disciplines attempted an eclectic integration of new or newly invigorated disciplines with the Aristotelian schemes inherited from the Middle Ages; even traditionalist Aristotelian classifications and curricula shifted the balance of the disciplines. Only a few authors proposed bold departures from the Aristotelian legacy.

Humanists often used their classifications to support new claims for the centrality of the disciplines they favored, whether grammar, dialectic, history, or mathematics. A fine example of this strategy, widely circulated in its time and well studied today, is the *Panepistemon* of Angelo Poliziano, which began as an inaugural lecture in a course at the University of Florence, and was printed in numerous editions in Italy and in France, where it was also tacitly reused by at least two other authors. The vast array of sources Poliziano brought together in this eclectic synthesis of previous classifications is exemplary of the new range of humanist scholarship; his overarching argument was also typical of humanist disciplinary priorities, in that he hailed the *grammaticus*, rather than the philosopher, as the omniscient scholar capable of studying all texts.[16]

The mechanical arts generally experienced a rise in status in Renaissance classifications – they were more consistently included, whereas previously they had often been left out altogether.[17] Although the modern notion of "fine arts" only appeared in the eighteenth century, painting and sculpture



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rose in status from their medieval standing as artisanal crafts; humanists debated not whether to include them among the arts and sciences, but whether to position them among the sciences or within eloquence as an art of expression.[18] Many disciplines once considered lowly and mechanical were given a lift in status by their association with mathematics – among them, for example, navigation, ballistics, and painting (e.g. through the use of perspective). In the sixteenth century mathematicians successfully touted the ancient pedigree of their discipline, which gained further prestige from the humanist recovery of texts of Greek mathematics and from the patronage of princes eager for both the prestige and the material benefits which mathematics promised.[19] Commentaries on Euclid offered the occasion for boasting of the areas which mathematics could encompass. In his commentary on Euclid Proclus had noted six kinds of mixed mathematics (already up from Aristotle's three); in his preface to the first English translation of Euclid in 1570, John Dee's list of mathematical disciplines named thirty fields of study, many of them terms which Dee coined for the first time in a bold forecast of mathematical achievements to come.[20]

Even among self-avowed Aristotelian traditionalists, the hierarchy of the disciplines in the sixteenth century was subject to new emphases as influential figures promoted their own disciplines and interests. Across Europe philosophy was taught to younger students in this period than in the Middle Ages.[21] In the training of Jesuits at the Collegio Romano Christopher Clavius (1538–1612) successfully argued for a greater place for mathematics and the mixed sciences. This change helped to foster a new mathematical approach to physics, along the lines of the interests of the Merton school of the fourteenth century, though Clavius did not refer to them or to earlier medieval debates about the status of the "scientiae mediae."[22] Jacopo Zabarella at Padua argued in his treatise on the hierarchy of the disciplines for a greater autonomy for physics,[23] while the great Spanish scholastic Francisco Suárez (1548–1617) valued metaphysics above all as the discipline from which to prove God through reason.[24] Protestant scholastics also offered multiple variations on the traditional elements of classifications.[25]

Only a few late Renaissance figures openly rejected received classificatory schemes and the curricula to which they were related. In Paris in the 1550s and 1560s Petrus Ramus called for a complete overhaul of the university curriculum based on Aristotle. He proposed to replace it with a single dialectical method applicable to all fields which promised easy mastery of a subject through the systematic use of definition and division. Ramus attributed his reliance on these principles, as well as his special praise of mathematics, to the inspiration of Plato.[26] Ramus had no lasting impact on the French curriculum, but developed a considerable following, especially after



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his death in the St. Bartholomew's Day killings, among German and English Calvinists.[27] The notion of unifying the disciplines through a single method was a shocking reduction of the Aristotelian conception of method, according to which every discipline had its own method appropriate to its subject matter and level of abstraction.[28] Ramism is best known for the dichotomous diagrams used to lay out the divisions of each subject, but diagramming predated Ramus who was indebted to the visual presentations devised by an earlier generation of pedagogues, including Rudolph Agricola and Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples.[29] Diagramming also proved more versatile than Ramus' particular method and was used not only by full-fledged Ramists but also to present more traditional schemes of the disciplines, as in the ornate tables of philosophy published by Christofle de Savigny (1587).[30]

Francis Bacon was another bold opponent of received classifications and sorted the disciplines not according to the usual criteria of degree of abstraction or type of subject matter, but rather according to the three faculties of the mind – reason, memory, and imagination. Bacon was likely inspired by a late antique interpretation of Galen's partition of the soul which circulated from the Middle Ages down to Bacon's day.[31] In his *Advancement of Learning* (1605) and his own revised Latin translation of it in 1623 (as *De augmentis scientiarum*), Bacon emphasized the unity of the sciences and the role of practical as well as theoretical disciplines in furthering the governance of civil society.[32] His classification came to stand for the superiority of reason when d'Alembert selected it as the basis for his "tree of the sciences" in the *Encyclopédie*. But Bacon himself took no such position; he expected great things from history (a discipline of memory) and kept a place in his own work for the imagination (e.g. in the allegorical interpretation of ancient wisdom).

Changes in the classification of the disciplines during the Renaissance can be exemplified by the contrast between two encyclopedias organized around the disciplines – Gregor Reisch's *Margarita philosophica* (1503) and Johann Heinrich Alsted's *Encyclopedia* (1630). Reisch's 500-page quarto volume covered the seven liberal arts and the three philosophies. Alsted's four-volume work, totaling 2,400 folio pages, encompassed much more material and all kinds of new disciplines, for many of which Alsted coined his own terms. Alsted's propaedeutic *praecognita* were not the liberal arts, but rather, under the impact of Ramist thinking, focused on the methods of studying and the principles of the disciplines. Philologia was also preparatory to philosophy which was divided into theoretical and practical, followed by the three higher faculties. Alsted then described twenty-one mechanical arts (from brewing to playing musical instruments) and ended with a "farrago of disciplines" comprising forty-one fields of study from Cabala and the physics of Moses to the study of tobacco ("tobacologia"). In his attempt to harmonize



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all knowledge Alsted introduced in the farrago some fields that were incompatible with approaches described in the earlier sections of his work.[33] The fact that the content of Alsted's *Encyclopedia* was bursting out of even its eclectic system of classification is perhaps one of the reasons why the next generation of disciplinary encyclopedias was arranged alphabetically rather than systematically.[34]

## The organization of facts in history and natural history

History was generally left out of Renaissance educational curricula because it was considered not complex enough to require instruction and too bulky to include.[35] But history, human and natural, offers a rich field in which to study how Renaissance scholars organized increasing quantities of material, in collections of specimens and manuscript notes and above all voluminous printed books. Human history was one of the disciplines favored by the humanists who viewed it as a source of examples of past errors and successes which could usefully inform the political and ethical decisions of their day.[36] Humanism fueled a special interest in ancient history, but medieval and contemporary histories were also printed in great numbers. Interest in history spawned a new genre offering advice about how to read and to write books of history known as the *ars historica*. In his *Method for the Easy Comprehension of History* (1566), for example, Jean Bodin recommended flagging in the margins of history books actions which proved useful or not and honorable or not so that one could easily find cases to guide one's own behavior. Passages annotated in the way Bodin recommended could also be copied out into a notebook under the appropriate heading (e.g. "useful and dishonorable actions," "useless and dishonorable" ones, or other topical headings) under which they could be retrieved again. This practice of note-taking fueled the publication of compilations of historical exempla which promised to offer all the rewards of history reading – memorable passages distilled from hundreds of histories – without the effort of reading the sources directly. The largest of these compilations reached thousands of folio pages filled with historical anecdotes selected as exemplary in some way; most collections of exempla and apophthegms were shorter, but faced on a lesser scale the same problems of selection, heading assignment, and arrangement.

Natural history also experienced unusually rapid growth during the Renaissance, stimulated at first by humanist attempts to identify the plants and animals named in the recently recovered treatises of natural history by classical authors, and further expanded by the many new species reported by travelers to the New World as well as by closer attention to the Old World. The number of known plants exploded from the 500 listed in the natural history



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of Dioscorides, who ranked as the greatest botanical authority in 1550, to some 6,000 plants cataloged by Caspar Bauhin in 1623.[37]

Renaissance scholars faced an unprecedented growth of content in these fields, largely through the accumulation of discrete chunks of information (similar in many ways to what we call "facts"), but the methods they deployed to organize all that material were medieval in origin.[38] Selecting or summarizing from textual sources and sorting and storing these passages under topical headings constituted the basic operations underlying medieval florilegia and the compendia conventionally called "medieval encyclopedias." The size and sophistication of these collections increased in the thirteenth century, during an earlier period of knowledge explosion, thanks to new practices of alphabetization (starting with the biblical concordances of the thirteenth century, then spreading to alphabetical indexes for many kinds of texts) and textual layout which facilitated reading by consultation rather than straight through. The use of different sizes of script, of running heads, rubrication and numbered sections and subdivisions was typical of scholastic as opposed to monastic manuscripts.[39] Collections of historical material in print experimented with new techniques (e.g. dingbats, different fonts and formats, greater use of centering and blank space) to increase the consultability of volumes which became steadily larger in size without, thanks to printing, becoming prohibitive in price.[40]

The assignment of a passage to a topical heading under which it could later be retrieved remained unchanged as the primary strategy for information management in the Renaissance, both in the commonplace notes that pupils in humanist schools were trained to take on their reading, and in the printed compendia which offered ready-made the kinds of notes Renaissance users would have wanted to have taken themselves.[41] The personal judgment of the note-taker or compiler governed the selection of the authors and texts to excerpt and of the particular passages copied out (and sometimes tacitly rephrased in the process), then of the heading under which to file each passage. The arrangement of the headings in the collection (and to a much lesser extent of the passages within a heading) was also decided by the compiler. In manuscript collections headings were generally formed in the order in which they occurred to the note-taker in the course of reading, whatever the sequence of texts; manuscript notes almost never discussed the arrangement of headings. In print Renaissance compilers often did justify their choice of organizational scheme from among the three principal options of miscellaneous, alphabetical, or systematic arrangements.

The self-consciously miscellaneous order found in a number of Renaissance compilations was without medieval antecedent; the authors of miscellanies invoked the model of the Roman author Aulus Gellius who claimed to have



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composed his *Attic Nights* in the order in which he read texts and made observations on them. Miscellaneous order was probably rarely due to simple happenstance and often betrayed loose topical associations.[42] Nonetheless various miscellanies proclaimed that a fortuitous arrangement added variety to the pleasure of reading. Typically one or more alphabetical indexes appended to the miscellaneous text made the material accessible to the user in search of a specific topic.[43] An alphabetical order of headings was common in medieval florilegia and perpetuated in many Renaissance collections of quotations and anecdotes; it offered the greatest ease of use, but was criticized for being dictated by the arbitrariness of "grammar." A systematic order on the contrary promised conceptual beauty in matching the order of things.[44]

Renaissance encyclopedic works featured many different systematic schemes, from the chain of being to the decalog.[45] Some purported to facilitate memorization; others strove for pansophy, or the wisdom that comes from knowing all things and their interconnections.[46] Large-sized printed compilations typically featured one or more alphabetical indexes which allowed for an alternative mode of access.[47] This was the case for one of the most elaborately classified compilations, the *Theatrum humanae vitae* (1565) in which Theodor Zwinger gathered historical exempla on a grand scale under topical headings with multiple layers of sections and subsections carefully arranged (and rearranged in two subsequent editions published in his lifetime) according to elaborate Ramist diagrams.[48] Zwinger prided himself on devising an order which was not chronological, but "rhapsodic," as he called it, designed to highlight the ethical value of his material, which he sorted broadly by vices and virtues. That Zwinger's systematic order proved effective for users is doubtful; one contemporary commented that it was difficult to find anything in Zwinger's *Theatrum* except through the index.[49] The work was indeed published with an increasing number of alphabetical indexes, by topical heading first, then by proper names and "memorable words and things" (cf. our notion of "keyword"). In enlarging on Zwinger's *Theatrum* in his *Magnum theatrum* of 1631 Beyerlinck resorted to alphabetizing the major headings, noting that "many approved little of the systematic order for history."[50]

Natural historians grappled with similar tensions between the ideal of a system that would represent faithfully the complexity and hierarchy of nature and the practicalities of retrieving information in large-scale compilations. Renaissance natural history is well known for its lack of a "scientific classification" – modern classifications were introduced in the eighteenth century for both plants and animals (e.g. by Linnaeus and Cuvier among others). Renaissance classifications of plants and animals used categories formed in antiquity (by Aristotle, Theophrastus, and Dioscorides especially),



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based on common experience: tree, shrub, undershrub and herb; quadrupeds, reptiles, fish, and birds. Subdivisions within these broad categories varied with different authors. Ulisse Aldrovandi, who studiously avoided any use of alphabetical order as merely grammatical and arbitrary, sorted birds in his three-volume *Ornithologiae* according to their habits and habitats (in three main categories: birds of prey, birds that roll in the dust, birds that live on or near water), then according to specific physical features (similarities in beaks, feathers, etc).[51] Similarly, in botany, "small-scale" groupings of similar plant types were juxtaposed with one another rather arbitrarily.[52]

Alphabetical order had already been used for listing plants and animals in compendia starting in the thirteenth century.[53] In the sixteenth century natural historians who opted for alphabetization acknowledged the arbitrariness of "grammatical order," but explained its virtues, as Conrad Gesner did in the preface to his four-folio volume *Historiae animalium*: "the utility of lexica [like his] comes ... not from reading them from beginning to end, which would be more tedious than useful, but from consulting it from time to time."[54] By referring to his natural histories as lexica, Gesner highlighted their similarity to the genres focused on organizing words and books for which alphabetical order was common (though not universal). Although Gesner's natural histories were widely respected and his choice of alphabetical order was imitated by some, many continued to search for the perfect systematic order. During the 1620s Federico Cesi developed detailed plans for a "theater of nature" which would represent the reality of nature in all its complex relationships, but the plans were never implemented beyond printing a few diagrams and constituting a large collection of exquisite drawings from nature.[55] Caspar Bauhin took a more pragmatic approach in listing thousands of kinds of plants, with references to the authors who described them; Bauhin offered no charts nor even a table of contents outlining the order he followed – the work is accessible primarily through the alphabetical index.[56]

## The organization of objects

After considering theoretical classifications of the disciplines and the arrangements of textual excerpts in historical compilations, I will turn briefly to the organization in Renaissance collections of physical objects of different kinds, from natural specimens to books. However, these collections (even in libraries) have not been preserved with their Renaissance ordering undisturbed, so that our evidence for them is indirect, from representations of the collections in images or through written inventories and catalogs.



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Cabinets of curiosities brought together the widest array of objects, from unicorn horns (narwhal tusks) to American bows and exquisitely crafted gemstones. Judging from the images we have of these collections, the physical constraints of the objects and the display space (usually a single room) often dictated a rather haphazard physical arrangement.[57] Given the expenses and difficulties of amassing such collections, most were not very large and did not require extensive organization for pragmatic reasons. But in manuscript and printed inventories owners generally grouped their objects according to basic categories, notably in sections for *naturalia* and *artificialia*, each with further subdivisions, e.g. for minerals, plants, shells, medals, and paintings. Within each section the items were not clearly ordered, though the most significant and costly items in a section would typically be listed first.[58] The most sophisticated inventories, notably of the lavish Kunstkammern at Ambras and Prague in the Holy Roman Empire, added a category of *scientifica* for instruments of scientific observation and emphasized a hierarchy of materials, from specimens in their unadorned natural state to those which blended nature and art, culminating in those which displayed the greatest level of human artistry.[59] Distinct from cabinets of curiosities, with their encyclopedic scope and often symbolic significance, were the collections of natural specimens gathered and organized for practical or pedagogical purposes in markets, homes, gardens, laboratories, and anatomy theaters – all of which sites of knowledge have recently started to garner scholarly attention.[60]

Collections of coins and epigraphs stimulated by humanist interest in antiquity also required organization, especially since they reached much larger proportions than most cabinets of curiosities – coins were small and not yet very expensive and epigraphs were recorded by copying out (though some collected the stone inscriptions when they could). Coins could be sorted (at least in the books describing them – the actual order of the collection is generally not known) by emperor, time and place, by size, by metal, by tails or heads.[61] A massive collection of epigraphs by Jan Gruter was organized in twenty classes by author of inscription and published with twenty-four alphabetical indexes produced by Joseph Scaliger according to a variety of criteria (interesting words used, temples at which they were found, professions or family members mentioned, among others).[62]

The most widely used and collected objects were books. Personal libraries increased over tenfold in size from 1450 to 1650 as a result of the lower cost, greater availability, and increasing accumulation of printed books.[63] Most personal collections were not cataloged – we know of them through inventories after death which were often arranged in order of decreasing commercial value. Institutional libraries typically maintained more or less sophisticated inventories for internal use (to record the movement of books acquired, lost, traded,



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or lent out), so that a formal catalog was not always produced. Examples of library catalogs arranged by author and/or subject (and even one union catalog covering the holdings of multiple monasteries) existed in the Middle Ages.[64] But the genre developed much more in the Renaissance: libraries were increasingly open to users beyond in-house residents of a college or monastery; printed catalogs were useful to attract patronage or boost reputation. The first printed catalog was that of the Bodleian (1605); interleaved and annotated copies of this printed catalog were also used as catalogs by other libraries.

Sales catalogs appeared soon after printing to aid in attracting buyers for new imprints. Used books were also traded, though we have little information about this trade, except through the practice of auctioning larger book collections which began in the Low Countries in the late sixteenth century. Catalogs of books for sale (auction and booksellers' catalogs) generally observed practical considerations of use and storage in addition to basic disciplinary divisions: books were sorted into size (folio, quarto, octavo) and languages (Latin and the separate vernaculars). These catalogs typically started with the largest (and most expensive) items and moved from the most prestigious disciplines to the newer, smaller fields – from theology, law, and medicine to mathematics and poetry. Within each section (broken down by discipline, size, and language) there were not too many books to list them in random order.[65]

Library catalogs on the other hand were generally produced only for the largest libraries and were therefore considerably longer and made greater use of alphabetical lists by author – either in a single alphabetical list, or, as in the case of the Bodleian catalog of 1605, within sections for each of the disciplines. Subject indexes to the lists of authors were rare and dependent on the diligence of the librarian who was often also charged with many other tasks.[66] Whether printed or manuscript, Renaissance library catalogs were drawn up with few provisions for new additions – catalogs did not take the form of moveable slips before at least the eighteenth century, although slips were sometimes used in the process of alphabetizing and could even be glued onto sheets to form the catalog itself.[67] Typically catalogs grew by annotation for a time; then a new catalog was made to supersede the old.

The bibliography was another essential tool for managing the knowledge of books in the Renaissance since it listed books beyond any single collection and could include even authors by whom little or nothing was actually extant. Conrad Gesner's attempt at an exhaustive listing of all authors and works in Greek, Latin and Hebrew in his *Bibliotheca universalis* (1545) far surpassed in scope and ambition the few medieval contributions to the genre.[68] Gesner arranged the material in a single alphabetized list of authors but planned to add a topical index to all their works; though this plan was not fully carried out, Gesner did publish an associated volume (the *Pandectae*, 1548) which



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listed the relevant books and sections of books by discipline and topical subheadings.[69] Gesner favored alphabetical order as facilitating consultation, but the first bibliographer of French vernacular books articulated a further virtue of alphabetical order when dealing with living authors. La Croix du Maine explained that he would order his collection of treatises on the noble houses of France by "the order of a, b, c, . . . so as to anger no one," as he would if he attempted a hierarchical order.[70] The use of alphabetical order in the Renaissance should not be interpreted as a rejection of social or intellectual hierarchies, but it presented pragmatic advantages for the reader as well as the author, in sparing them the difficulties of ordering information according to an increasingly complex understanding of reality.

**In summary**

During the Renaissance institutions often did not seem to change much. Old universities were governed by medieval statutes and served as the models for the many new foundations; only a few schools were designed to institutionalize the humanist disciplines, such as the trilingual colleges in Louvain (1517) and Paris (1530). Academies were only just beginning to offer durable alternative sites for intellectual work (e.g. Accademia del Disegno, 1561; Accademia dei Lincei, 1603; Académie française, 1630). Though it was an increasingly eclectic Aristotelianism, Aristotelianism continued to dominate university teaching (until the 1690s in Paris, for example).[71] At the same time the Renaissance was a period of great intellectual and cultural ferment: printing, humanism, and new discoveries stimulated new areas of study and the accumulation of much new material. History and natural history grew especially fast, despite minimal institutional support, by appealing to the interests of a broadening educated elite: examples from human history would improve current political and ethical decisions and the collection of natural historical specimens and descriptions would promote a greater appreciation of God's creation and the potential for better mastery of it (notably in medicine and pharmacy). Activities once considered artisanal and mechanical acquired new status from court patronage and from the introduction of mathematical techniques (whether successful or only prospective). The proliferation of books fueled the growth of compilations which offered the best selections from all those books one didn't have money to buy or time to read oneself, as well as increasingly sophisticated library and sales catalogs.

Many of the structures used for organizing knowledge in the Renaissance – the hierarchical classification of the disciplines, the use of headings to sort and store material, and the use of alphabetical order in texts, indexes and



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catalogs – were inherited from the Middle Ages. But these structures were expanded and transformed during the Renaissance as they accommodated new fields of study and massive quantities of new material. Renaissance authors experimented with different classifications of the disciplines and many kinds of order, from the miscellaneous to the systematic. Alphabetical order, already prevalent in dictionaries, bibliographies, and many florilegia in the Middle Ages, appeared increasingly in other genres too during the Renaissance: in library catalogs, in some natural histories, and as an index to improve the useability of miscellaneously or systematically arranged compilations. But the dominance of alphabetical order which persisted until recently (until the rise of electronic media) began only in the late seventeenth century. The organization of knowledge in the Renaissance took many forms, often complex and original, which invite further study at the intersections of the cultural history and the history of the book with intellectual history and the history of philosophy.

## NOTES

I am grateful for excellent suggestions to Mordechai Feingold, Anthony Grafton, James Hankins, and Nancy Siraisi.

1. For some discussion of the meanings of the "organization of knowledge," see Bliss 1929, ch. 4. For the best entries into the topic, see Burke 2000, esp. ch. 5 and Kelley and Popkin 1991; for a somewhat later period, see Daston 1992, 207–20.
2. For a philosophical approach see Piaget 1967. Lévi-Strauss interpreted classification as an attempt to control the world in Lévi-Strauss 1962. For a sophisticated interdisciplinary approach see Bowker and Star 1999.
3. On this point and eighteenth-century classifications more generally, see Yeo 2003, 248; Tonelli 1975, 265.
4. Still useful is the general historical overview by Flint 1904; see Frängsmyr 2001.
5. For the tripartition see *Topics* VI, 6, 145a15; for allusions to bipartition see *Topics* VII, 1 and *Metaphysics* I, 1 and VI, 1. For further references to Aristotle and discussion see Mariétan 1901, ch. 1. For a discussion of how Aristotle's tripartite division of speculative philosophy was indebted to Plato's tripartition of being, see Merlan 1953, 59–87.
6. On the Stoic tripartite division of philosophy, see White 2003, 124. On the attribution of a tripartite classification of philosophy to Plato by Sextus Empiricus, see Flint 1904, 70 (citing *Adversus Mathematicos* VII, 16); on Augustine's role in this attribution, see Paulmier-Foucart 2004, 229, citing *De civitate dei*, VIII, 4.
7. My discussion of medieval classifications is especially indebted to Weisheipl 1965 and 1977. Augustine was suspicious of astronomy (*De doctrina Christiana*, II, 29) but planned a *disciplinarum libri* on all seven liberal arts; see Weisheipl 1965, 57.
8. See Weisheipl 1965, 58–65 for diagrams and more detailed discussion of the primary sources: Boethius, *In Isagogen Porphryii Commentarii*; Cassiodorus, *Institutiones*, II, 3, 4 and Isidore, *Etymologiae*, II, 24,1.



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9. Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon*, I, 4–11. See more generally Whitney 1990.
10. Weisheipl 1977, 475. See also Dahan 1990; studies of specific classifications include Steneck 1975 and Lutz 1956.
11. Weisheipl 1965, 475. On Arabic classifications including al-Farabi's fivefold division of the sciences (into sciences of language, logic, mathematics, physics, and politics), see Jolivet 1977.
12. Vincent offers excerpts on classification by Isidore of Seville, Hugh of St. Victor, Richard of St. Victor, Michael Scot, Aristotle, al-Farabi, Avicebron, and Augustine. Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum doctrinale*, book I, chs. 14–18, available in French translation in Paulmier-Foucart 2004, 231–7.
13. On Aristotle's ideas on this point, see Mariétan 1901, 30ff. On the emergence of the notion of "scientia media" in the Middle Ages (notably with Thomas Aquinas), see Gagné 1969.
14. These Platonizing scholastics included Robert Grosseteste, Roger Bacon, and Robert Kilwardby; see Lindberg 1977, 477–8.
15. Two examples are cited in the literature: Ficino translated work by the Greek Albinos, a Platonic-eclectic author of the mid-second century, who proposed a synthesis between the Aristotelian and the Platonic/Stoic classifications; see Tonelli Olivieri 1991, 80, n. 69. Geminus of Rhodes developed the category of "sensible mathematics" as a more inclusive category than Aristotle's "mixed" sciences; excerpts from Geminus were printed and translated in the Renaissance in the *Sphaera* of Proclus (pseudo) (*c.* 1522). On Geminus and his influence, see Mandosio 1994.
16. His classification is ultimately quite familiar: tripartite (theoretical, practical and logical), with careful attention to mathematics and to the seven mechanical arts (from Hugh of St. Victor). See Mandosio 2002 and 1997. On the *fortuna* of this text and its reuse by other authors in sixteenth-century France, see Mandosio 2000a. See also Maïer 1960. For another humanist classification, see Mandosio 2000b.
17. On the rise of the mechanical arts, see Rossi 1970.
18. Kristeller 1951; for the Renaissance period see Farago 1991.
19. See Rose 1975; on the parallel role of occultists like Agrippa of Nettesheim in promoting mathematical sciences, see Grafton 2002.
20. See Dee's preface in Euclid 1570, p. I–50. Also available in Dee 1975.
21. Tuck 1998, 17–19.
22. Ariew 1990.
23. Mikkeli 1997.
24. Lohr in Schmitt *et al.* 1988 and Lohr 1991. On Spanish classifications more generally see Jacobs 1996.
25. See Freedman 1994, esp. 51–6 for a number of diagrams of specific systems.
26. The best account of Ramus remains Ong 1958; see 43–4 on the role of Plato in Ramus' thought.
27. See Feingold, Freedman, and Rother 2001.
28. Gilbert 1960; see also Edwards 1976.
29. Ong 1958, 74–91. For antecedents to Ramus' use of dichotomous diagrams see also Murdoch 1984 and Höltgen 1965.
30. De Savigny 1587; on this point, see Burke 2000, 97–8.
31. Tonelli Olivieri 1991.
32. Kusukawa 1996.



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33. On Alsted's strategies of harmonization, see Hotson 2000 and Blair 2000a.
34. Notably as "dictionaries of the arts and sciences"; see Yeo 2001.
35. Gilbert Jacchaeus (1635) as quoted in Blair 1997, 35. In Renaissance classifications history was variously defined narrowly as human history or broadly as human and natural history; on these interactions see Mandosio 1995 and Pomata and Siraisi 2005.
36. On exemplar history see Nadel 1964.
37. See Ogilvie 1997.
38. For an entry into the recent historiography on the rise of the notion of "fact" in the early modern period, see Blair 2005, 283ff. and Daston 2001. On the problem of overload more generally, see Blair 2003.
39. For an introduction to their many studies on scholastic tools and *ordinatio* see M. and R. Rouse 1991, esp. chs. 4–7.
40. Medieval florilegia were often brief, whereas the most widely printed Renaissance florilegium, Domenico Nanni Mirabelli's *Polyanthea*, started at *c.* 500,000 words and grew in successive editions to about three million words by 1600. The all-time largest encyclopedia of the Middle Ages, Vincent of Beauvais' *Speculum maius* weighed in at about three million words, while its late Renaissance equivalent, Laurentius Beyerlink's *Magnum theatrum* (1631), reached fifteen million words. Although these very large reference books were of course very expensive relative to smaller books, the cheapening of book production by printing made it feasible to produce and market such large works.
41. For an entry into the considerable literature on commonplacing see Moss 1996 and Blair 1992, and on note-taking more generally, Blair 2004. On marginal annotation, see Fera *et al.* 2002.
42. This point is made convincingly about Gellius' arrangement, for example, in Holford-Strevens 2003, 30–6.
43. On the virtues of miscellaneous order see Poliziano 1522, preface. On the genre of the miscellaneously arranged commentary see Blair 2006. On the relation of Renaissance commentary to ancient and medieval commentaries, see Pade 2005.
44. See the tag "nothing is more beautiful than order," as in Fatio 1971.
45. See, respectively, Girolamo Cardano, *De subtilitate* (1551), Andreas Hondorff, *Promptuarium exemplorum* (1572) as discussed, among over a dozen different kinds of systematic orders, in Michel 2002, at 46, 58.
46. Most famously Giulio Camillo Delminio designed a "theater of memory" as a physical space which one could enter to contemplate an ordered display of all knowledge; on his program and its context and impact see Bolzoni 2001. For a rich survey of pansophic writing, see Schmidt-Biggeman 1983.
47. On Renaissance indexing see Blair 2000b.
48. Zwinger 1565, with ever larger re-editions in 1571 and 1586 and a posthumous reprinting (with an additional index) in 1604.
49. Keckermann 1614, 224 (misprinted as 210).
50. Beyerlinck 1666. sig. [e3]v; this preface is not present in all copies of the edition of 1631, though the shift to alphabetical had been made. Nonetheless, the articles in Beyerlinck were often very long ("Bellum" runs to 106 pages) and maintained Zwinger's subdivisions within them.
51. For an excerpt in translation, see Aldrovandi 1963; see more generally Hall 1991. On Aldrovandi's organizational practices, which included drawing up



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hierarchical tables to accompany his collection of natural historical specimens, see Findlen 1994, 60–2.
52. Ogilvie calls these groupings "pre-theoretical"; Ogilvie 2006, 218–19.
53. Hünemörder 1983.
54. Gesner 1551, sig. β1v.
55. See Freedberg 2002. On the use of tables and grids in natural history, see Swan 2002. A grid-like layout of natural specimens in a box with $6 \times 6$ pigeonholes called a *pantotheca* is described in the opening pages of the "Colloquium heptaplomeres" traditionally ascribed to Jean Bodin (*c.* 1590); see Bodin 1975.
56. Bauhin 1623.
57. For some examples see Findlen 1994, esp. ch. 3. Michele Mercati's cabinets for arranging metals constitute a rare case in which the physical arrangement matched a conceptual one. The plates of Mercati's *Metallotheca* were made in 1580 but printed only in 1717; see Cooper 1995.
58. For an example see Trichet *c.* 1635.
59. On this interpretation of the Kunstkammer as a celebration of Promethean ambitions (notably in automata), see Bredekamp 1995. In a work which became an important model for the Habsburg inventories, though it was an abstract classification associated with no real collection, Samuel Quiccheberg offered a fivefold division of a Kunstkammer into objects pertaining to the ruler and his realm, arts and crafts, natural specimens, *artificialia* and paintings; for a modern edition and German translation of this work of 1565 see Quiccheberg 2000.
60. See Findlen 2001; Park and Daston 2006, chs. 8–9, 12–13. On the symbolic role of cabinets of curiosities, see Pomian 1990.
61. On collections of medals, see Schnapper 1988, 133ff. I am also grateful to Brian Ogilvie for expert advice on this point.
62. Gruter 1603.
63. For example, French royal magistrates in the late fifteenth century typically owned around sixty books; see Geneviève Hasenohr in Vernet 1988, 239. In the sixteenth century French magistrates ordinarily owned 500–1,000 books and up to 3,000 books in exceptional cases. See Charon-Parent 1988.
64. Derolez 1979.
65. See Pollard and Ehrman 1965 and Charon and Parinet 2000. For an example see de Jonge 1977.
66. For an example of elaborate cataloging at the cathedral library of Zurich, see Germann 1994. On late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century librarians and a number of their classifications, see Caillet 1988.
67. See Jayne 1956. For examples of catalogs formed by annotating a printed catalog or from alphabetized manuscript slips glued onto sheets, see the late seventeenth-century catalogs of the Bibliothèque Mazarine, Paris, MS 4138 and 4134 respectively. Concerning the first library catalog on cards, see Krajewski 2002, 35ff. On the use of slips more generally see Blair (forthcoming).
68. Medieval bibliographies were few in number and generally focused on a geographical area or a religious order; see M. and R. Rouse 1986.
69. On Gesner see Zedelmaier 1992, and (among other articles) Mueller 1998.
70. La Croix du Maine 1584, sig. aiijr.
71. See Schmitt 1983a and Brockliss 2002.



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# 16

DAVID A. LINES

# Humanistic and scholastic ethics

## Two approaches to the teaching of ethics

Renaissance humanists are known for the interest they took in ethics and moral philosophy. Many of them may have found it hard to practice virtues such as modesty and friendship, but countless letters, treatises, and dialogues (penned by authors such as Petrarch, Leonardo Bruni, and Erasmus) testify to their preoccupation with ethical issues. It is significant that the *studia humanitatis* (the cycle of humanist studies that included literature and history) had as their goal the formation of the perfect man, prominent for his virtue as much as for his eloquence (*vir bonus dicendi peritus*).

It would be a mistake, however, to regard the humanists as having revived the study of ethics after centuries of neglect. Scholastic writers had already given special attention to this subject, which they studied within the broader context of moral philosophy. Albert the Great (1200–80), one of the thirteenth-century architects of a renewed interest in Aristotelian thought, wrote two works on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and infected his student, Thomas Aquinas (1225–74), with a similar enthusiasm for the Stagirite's moral treatises. Robert Grosseteste (1168–1253), Giles of Rome (1245–1316), Walter Burley (*c.* 1275–1344/5), and John Buridan (*c.* 1300 – after 1358) were only a few of the scholars who provided influential interpretations of Aristotelian moral philosophy in the late Middle Ages.[1] Also, far from retreating into their supposed bunkers of logic and natural philosophy, scholastics of the Renaissance period wrote on moral philosophy even more prolifically than before. John Argyropoulos (*c.* 1415–87), a Greek émigré, provided a translation of the *Ethics* that was better received than Leonardo Bruni's.[2] In the sixteenth century, John Mair (1467/8–1550), Crisostomo Javelli (*c.* 1470/2–1538), and Francisco Suárez (1548–1617) wrote important works on ethics and politics.[3] Several times, Averroes' middle commentary on the *Ethics* was reprinted.[4]



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Not only were both the humanists and the scholastics avid students of ethics,[5] but they both saw a natural connection between ethics, oeconomics, and politics. There was a common agreement that these fields – all concerned with the good of man and society – should be studied on the basis of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics* as well as the *Oeconomics* (which was commonly, but falsely, attributed to Aristotle). As we shall see, these works tended to be studied at the university level rather than in earlier years, but nonetheless they provided the foundation for any serious discussion of moral philosophy, even after the renewed availability of the works of Plato, Epictetus, and Lucretius.

An important point on which humanists and scholastics disagreed, however, was the approach they took to ethics. Humanists tended to associate ethics not only with oeconomics and politics, but also and especially with rhetoric. As mentioned above, they thought of the ideal orator as both virtuous and eloquent, and they tended to conflate purity of morals with purity of language. (How could an orator inspire virtue unless he himself was virtuous?) In a secondary sense, humanists often associated ethics with rhetoric when they assumed that *discussions* of ethics ought to be eloquent as well. (Given that language is far more persuasive than examples, how could the barbarous Latin of the Middle Ages hope to be an effective instrument of moral training?)[6] This entailed writing in the best classical Latin, but also displaying one's acquaintance with the works of that period through reference and allusion.

This last assumption ignited two significant controversies in fifteenth-century Florence. The first took place between Leonardo Bruni and his contemporaries when his translation of the *Ethics* began to circulate in 1416–17. Although Bruni's translation was not especially notable for its philosophical depth or for its novelty (it is essentially a revision of the thirteenth-century translation by William of Moerbeke), his elegant rendering and barbed attacks against the previous translator won him few friends among the scholastics. Alfonso da Cartagena, among others, reproved Bruni for presuming to replace a standard translation, which used a terminology carefully keyed to important concepts in professional philosophy, with a literary one that had little philosophical merit.[7]

In 1464 another important cultural figure in Florence, Niccolò Tignosi (1402–74), also had to defend his approach to the *Ethics*. In this case the polemic involved a commentary rather than a translation. According to Tignosi's apologia, one of the sore points concerned his commentary's emphasis on making the treasures of Aristotle's work accessible to anyone who knew Latin, even to those lacking a preparation in the technical jargon of professional philosophy. Furthermore, Tignosi blurred the boundaries



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between ethics and rhetoric by decorating his commentary with numerous references to historical examples and quotations from classical poetry.[8] Although Tignosi himself did not prize elegance in philosophical discussions and in any case was not much of a stylist, his critics viewed his approach to ethics as dangerous. To a great extent they were right: both Bruni and Tignosi were questioning the view, prevalent since the twelfth- and thirteenth-century revival of Aristotelian philosophy, that ethics was a branch of philosophy, and that as such it should be handled only by those with a university training in the subject.

The study of ethics in the Renaissance must therefore be understood in the context of this struggle between those who associated the subject with rhetoric and civic education and those who saw it primarily as part of the academic discipline of philosophy. During the fifteenth century the University of Florence reflected this uncertainty, as philosophers (such as Guglielmo Becchi and John Argyropoulos) and rhetoricians (such as Carlo Marsuppini and Angelo Poliziano) took turns teaching moral philosophy. By the sixteenth century the rhetoricians had clearly won the upper hand. The Florentine university, since 1473 transferred to Pisa, almost always appointed famous literary scholars such as Pier Vettori and Ciriaco Strozzi to teach ethics. The renaming of the chair as "philosophia moralis graeca et alia" (1556) was itself significant, since by then teachers were expected to know (and occasionally offer instruction in) the original languages. And rhetoric itself had evolved since the fifteenth century into a far more sophisticated form of philology. As a consequence, in Florence–Pisa commenting on the *Ethics* was often less of an effort to communicate Aristotle's vision of virtue than an exercise in augmenting (and displaying) knowledge about the language and history of the ancient world.

Certain Italian universities experimented with Florence's model, especially in the second half of the sixteenth century: Padua, for instance, hired famous rhetoricians such as Francesco Robortello and Giason de Nores to teach moral philosophy. Later it abandoned the rhetorical model and assigned the teaching of moral philosophy to clerics. In other universities ethics continued to be anchored to the philosophical curriculum. Bologna, for example, witnessed only one extended (but unpopular) attempt by a rhetorician to teach moral philosophy. In all other cases, trained philosophers (including Pietro Pomponazzi) were appointed to teach the subject.[9] In Rome, Marc-Antoine Muret (1526–85) was one of the few professors of moral philosophy in sixteenth-century Italy to continue the older joint emphasis on eloquence and ethics. None of his successors appears to have been a rhetorician.[10]



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## Advances in understanding the Aristotelian texts

In numerous cases the study of ethics in sixteenth-century Italy changed from a possible tool of personal development into a weapon in the service of theological, philosophical, or philological interests. But the considerable advances in understanding the texts of moral philosophy should not be discounted. One obvious activity in this regard was that of fresh translations. The medieval period had seen four translations of the *Ethics* into Latin (between *c.* 1150 and 1270). But at least five more were authored in the fifteenth century, and over twenty in the sixteenth (the heyday of Aristotelian interpretations), not counting the numerous – and still largely unstudied – translations into the vernacular.[11] In the universities the new translations (especially Argyropoulos') became accepted fairly quickly,[12] and the mere initiative of printing some of them alongside the older medieval translation[13] underlined important discrepancies and the need to find better Greek manuscripts. This was a project that occupied several Hellenists especially in Italy and France during the sixteenth century. Among the most notable results were Vettori's revised Greek edition of the text, the philological intuitions of Marc-Antoine Muret, and the translations with annotations by Denys Lambin and Joachim Périon.[14] Knowledge of Greek had grown to the point where it was occasionally possible to study and teach the *Ethics* in the original,[15] something that came to be expected of scholastic interpreters as well.

The *Nicomachean Ethics* was not the only work of Aristotelian moral philosophy to become better known in the Renaissance: six new translations of the *Magna moralia* were authored as well, and three of the *Eudemian Ethics*, which had become available to the West only in the early fifteenth century.[16] Commentators on the *Ethics* showed their increasing familiarity with all of these works and were forced to address their philosophical inconsistencies. Francesco Vimercato and Francesco Piccolomini were among the most active in this regard, and Piccolomini was notable for attributing the differences of views in these works to the historical development of Aristotle's thought – one of the first to advance such a view, anticipating the genetic approach of Werner Jaeger in the twentieth century.[17]

Finally, the interest in Greek and philology made possible a new appreciation for the Greek commentators on Aristotle (and Plato). A new original-language edition of the Greek commentators on the *Ethics*, which had already been translated by Grosseteste *c.* 1253, appeared in Venice in 1536. It made some considerable advances in identifying the individual authors of the commentary (formerly assigned indiscriminately to Eustratius) and laid the groundwork for Giovanni Bernardo Feliciano, who offered a fresh (and hugely popular) Latin translation of the commentary in 1541. For good measure,



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Feliciano also included a new translation of Aristotle's text.[18] The *Moral Questions* of Alexander of Aphrodisias (*c.* AD 200), which explore several problems in the *Ethics*, also became known at last; they were translated several times in the early sixteenth century before the version by Hieronymus and Johannes Baptista Bagolinus (a father–son team) finally made it into print in 1541.[19] The work went through at least another four editions in the sixteenth century. A more general use of the ancient Greek commentaries can be seen in numerous sixteenth-century interpretations of the *Ethics*, which in their prefaces, scholia, comments, or elsewhere repeatedly make reference to ancient interpreters such as Ammonius, Simplicius, and Philoponus, regardless of whether or not they had written on the *Ethics*.

## Accommodating pagan and Christian ethics

Humanists who studied ethics often combined their penchant for rhetoric and philology with broader considerations. One of the questions with which they wrestled was how to reconcile Aristotle's insights with those of the newly available corpus of Platonic writings, which was first fully published in Latin translation by Marsilio Ficino in 1484. Francesco Verino Secondo (1524–91), a professor of philosophy in Pisa, strongly supported reading Aristotle's *Ethics* and the relevant moral works of Plato side by side and suggested ways of making the two authors agree.[20] Muret's commentary[21] likewise addresses the problem of the discrepancies between Plato and Aristotle. But this was not an issue that interested the humanists alone. A work by the conservative Dominican Crisostomo Javelli (1470–1538) examined the *Ethics* with an eye to reconciling Plato and Aristotle, and this was an interest of several other scholastics such as Francesco Piccolomini (1523–1607), a famous professor of natural philosophy in Padua.[22] For none of these figures was the enterprise of comparing Plato with Aristotle a mere exercise in historical scholarship. As yet a truly historical approach to philosophy did not exist, and it was commonly assumed that, since there was only one truth, Aristotle and Plato must have disagreed only in wording (*verba*) rather than in substance (*res* or *sententia*). The result was a sustained attempt to reconcile the two systems of thought rather than letting their differences stand and choosing between them.

The Plato–Aristotle controversy was, however, far from academic since it was deeply connected with another problem, that of the relationship of pagan thought with Christianity.[23] Again, given the assumption that the ancients agreed among themselves (although Christians were a bit more enlightened than the rest), it stood to reason that there was no fundamental discord between Christian teachings and the doctrines of the pagan



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philosophers. However, the new availability of the Platonic writings in Latin threw out of balance the syntheses of the medieval period, which had known only two full dialogues of Plato. This was doubtless one reason for the new popularity of Eustratius of Nicaea (d. 1120), the Byzantine scholar whose commentary on the *Ethics* was strongly colored by Christian Neoplatonism and who made numerous references to biblical figures when discussing Aristotle's text.[24] Tellingly, all of the authors mentioned in the previous paragraph saw the Plato–Aristotle problem within this broader religious context. Some commentaries from the fifteenth century, such as that by the Florentine humanist Donato Acciaiuoli (1429–78),[25] already foreshadowed the discussion, which also came to be a central theme of several vernacular commentaries, such as those by Galeazzo Florimonte and Antonio Scaino.[26]

It was not, of course, in Italy alone that interpreters struggled with the relationship between Christianity and pagan moral philosophy. In Paris a humanist professor of philosophy, Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples (*c.* 1460–1536), who was also known for his scholarship on the Bible and would later sympathize with the Reformers, produced several works on the *Ethics*.[27] In these writings, Lefèvre made a sustained effort to reconcile Aristotelian and Christian notions of virtue. The effect was only magnified in the edition of Lefèvre's commentary prepared by his former student Josse Clichtove. While discussing the virtue of magnanimity, for instance, Clichtove did not hesitate to refer to biblical figures such as Mary, Job, the priests of the Old Testament, and the people of Israel.[28] Likewise, in Protestant lands interpretations of the *Ethics* did not limit themselves to a philological or even a philosophical exposition of the text. Philipp Melanchthon (1497–1560) was able to overcome Martin Luther's misgivings about Aristotle's *Ethics* (which seemed to Luther to promote the idea of unaided human perfectibility) by arguing that the work at least provided a useful starting point for the development of virtue. In and of itself it was no more useful for salvation than the Mosaic law, but if complemented by the truths of Christianity it could be helpful in the instruction of numerous young people.[29] As a result, Melanchthon's commentaries and epitomes became a standard feature of the curriculum in Lutheran territories. Professors of ethics in Nuremberg were directed by city officials to keep in mind the Christian aims of teaching their subject.[30] On the Calvinist side, Pietro Martire Vermigli (1499–1562) produced a commentary that was much praised by his followers for its accommodation between the Bible and Aristotle. Not surprisingly, Vermigli's lectures date from 1553–6, when he held a joint appointment to theology and moral philosophy in the Academy of Strasbourg.[31] However, he and his followers objected to conflating philosophy with theology (something they accused the scholastics of doing). In Basel, for instance, Theodor Zwinger



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(1533–88) did see moral philosophy as subservient to theology, but insisted that Aristotle could only discuss the human form of happiness, not the heavenly one revealed through the Scriptures. He therefore saw Aristotle's *Ethics* and Christianity as complementary, but did not wish to confuse them.[32]

The Catholic world had already enjoyed a long opportunity to consider strategies of accommodation between pagan and Christian ethics. As a rule, Epicurean and Stoic positions were dismissed as untenable and would remain so until the seventeenth century. In the fifteenth century, Platonic views offensive to Christianity (including the community of women in *The Republic*) were spiritualized, skipped over, or ignored.[33] In any case, Plato was not systematic enough to be pedagogically useful, although some tenets such as Platonic love did, of course, become influential after Ficino in literary circles. Conveniently, Aristotle was left as the only serious contender. The situation was "fortunate" because Aristotle was thought to have been tamed by Thomas Aquinas, whose *Summa theologiae* (in particular, the IIa IIae) contains an exhaustive examination of ethical problems, many of which are solved by a joint appeal to Scripture, theologians, and Aristotle. Thomas also authored a remarkably influential commentary on the *Ethics*, which – while formally a straightforward clarification of the text – subtly brought Aristotle's teachings in line with Christian doctrine, with some Platonic coloring to boot.[34]

Not everyone was satisfied with Thomas's approach, especially in central Europe, where university students in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Cracow, Prague, and Vienna diligently copied and repeated the questions of another famous Parisian master, John Buridan.[35] But Thomas never lacked a following, especially in Italy and among the members of his order. In fourteenth-century Italy, most interpreters of the *Ethics* drew heavily on Thomas's own commentary.[36] Acciaiuoli's commentary was admired partly for its faithfulness to the Dominican friar. Even Ottaviano Ferrari (1518–86), a pugnacious scholar who lectured on the *Ethics* in the Collegio Canobiano of Milan, could oppose but not ignore the saint from Aquino.[37] The effects were even clearer on the members of the Dominican and Jesuit orders. Around 1490 two near-contemporary Dominicans, Ludovico Valenza da Ferrara and Girolamo Savonarola, produced compendia of moral philosophy. Tellingly, these works are not digests of Aristotle's works, but of Thomas's *Summa* IIa IIae, even though they cover topics in ethics, oeconomics, and politics.[38] Moral philosophy got closer yet to theology with the Jesuit philosophical curriculum; not only was ethics ultimately studied right before (and in view of ) theology, but numerous teachers of the *Summa* (which in theology had replaced Peter Lombard's *Sentences*) had trouble distinguishing the IIa IIae from moral philosophy. Disputations on moral philosophy reflected this state of affairs, as they came increasingly to address theological issues.[39]



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In the universities of Paris and Spain, ethics and theology were entangled through institutional structures.[40] In Paris, arts courses were routinely offered by masters of theology, who therefore put their stamp on moral philosophy as well. The case of Martin le Maître (1432–82) is paradigmatic: the theologian wrote a treatise on moral philosophy, which was in turn expanded by one of his students, David Cranston.[41] In neither work are the boundaries between ethics and theology very clear, and in other works questions or disputations dealing with theological themes are frequent. The connection with theology was aided by the status of moral philosophy as an advanced subject, studied around the same time as metaphysics and therefore right before theology (for those who enrolled in that faculty). In Spain members of religious orders (or "regulars") were not prohibited, as in Paris, from university teaching. In Salamanca one often finds them teaching the moral philosophy course for long stretches of time, but it is not clear whether they gave a theological direction to their teaching. In Alcalá de Henares moral philosophy was taught on two occasions: both at the end of the arts course, and also to theology students.

As for Portugal, the documents for the universities of Coimbra and Évora do not point to any clear connection between theology and ethics. But it was the Jesuits of Coimbra, who had taken over the teaching in the "Colegio das Artes" (a direct competitor of the university), who produced the *Cursus Conimbricensis* – a series of influential commentaries on Aristotelian works.[42] The volume on *Ethics*, first published in 1593, is essentially a compendium of Thomas's *Summa* on moral problems.[43]

## The development of national and confessional traditions in ethical teaching

Ethics teaching in Spain, Portugal, and the Jesuit colleges had obvious similarities to that in Paris, since they all explicitly modeled themselves on the *mos parisiensis*. But differences increasingly developed, especially in the sixteenth century. Only in Spain were teachers expected to devote a three-year cycle to moral philosophy, covering the *Ethics, Oeconomics*, and *Politics*. In Portugal, Paris, and the Jesuit colleges it was enough to read (parts of) the *Ethics*. Paris itself gradually departed from its previous handling of ethics and, like Portugal, placed it earlier in the curriculum, in the same year as logic. The Jesuits came to place the subject at the end of the philosophy curriculum only toward the end of the century, after much debate. Rather surprisingly, not many sixteenth-century works on the *Ethics* are connected with either Spain or Portugal: in addition to the *Cursus Conimbricensis* (and excluding anonymous works) we know of only five in Portugal (all by Jesuits) and eight in Spain.[44]



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There was no such shortage in central Europe, whose universities too had developed according to the Parisian model. In addition to the numerous commentaries and disputations "ad mentem Buridani" referred to above, German-speaking lands produced a landslide of independent interpretations of the *Ethics*. Lectures on moral philosophy were to cover all of the *Ethics*, while the disputations covered only the first five or six books. The subject was an advanced one, required for the degree, and there were no real specialist teachers. During the Reformation the arts course was cut back to around two years, and moral philosophy (which also included the *Oeconomics* and *Politics*) was placed at the end of the first year. However, just as earlier, the subject tended to be assigned to teachers of arts, medicine, or law rather than to theologians.

The same was true in Oxford, although regulars occasionally taught the subject there. Increasingly, the *Politics* and *Oeconomics* also became eligible for regular lectures, but there was little room for multiple-year cycles as in Spain, so choices had to be made. In any case the ideal of ethics as an advanced and required subject seems to have persisted into the Renaissance. What is astounding, however, is the dearth of works on the *Ethics* produced in England. We know of only one prolusion for the fifteenth century and of the commentaries by John Case, William Temple, and Cuthbert Tunstall for the sixteenth.[45]

Italy offers a stark contrast to the universities mentioned above. Since theology was weak or nonexistent in the universities, and since arts and medicine formed a single faculty, philosophy teaching in Italy was offered by graduates either in arts or in arts and medicine, which made for little entanglement with theological considerations. Furthermore, moral philosophy was for a long time a subject of little importance: it arrived in the universities rather late (at the end of the fourteenth century), was poorly paid and staffed, was often an "add-on" to someone's teaching responsibilities, had no settled place in the curriculum, and was not required for the degree (which meant that it could only be taught on holidays). In the sixteenth century various developments took place: first, ethics became increasingly specialized, just like the other philosophical subjects. This meant that it tended to be taught for long stretches of time by a single person, which encouraged further thinking on the subject (and production of commentaries). A related development was that the course was typically spread out over five or six years. Hardly any student will have heard the entire course, but the professors' attention to detail was encouraged, especially as they were not required to teach the *Oeconomics* or *Politics*, which were commonly ignored in the universities. Finally, moral philosophy developed from an irregular holiday subject to an "ordinary" one, taught along with all the rest during regular days. This made for a more



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homogeneous audience and, presumably, for one better prepared to follow the teachers who taught on the original text.[46] These developments did not occur at the same time in all the universities, and the reasons behind them are too complex to be described here. Yet clearly in Italy ethics never attained the importance that it had acquired, say, in the universities of central Europe.

The institutional variety in the study and teaching of ethics described above points to some notable differences of approach and interpretation across Europe. For example, questions and disputations on the *Ethics* were not usual in Italy apart from among the Jesuits; quite the opposite was true in Paris and Spain. Yet there were also some common developments, often tied to the general evolution of philosophical literature in the Renaissance. One tendency was to avoid the strictures of academic philosophy altogether and discuss ethics in less traditional genres, such as dialogues and poetry, and in the vernacular.[47] Another tendency was tied more directly to the development of school philosophy. Just as introductions, systematizations, textbooks, and dichotomous tables became all the rage in sixteenth-century Aristotelianism,[48] so too in the case of ethics. The success of the works of Lefèvre, Zwinger, and Francesco Piccolomini is partly due to this demand.[49] A yearning for overviews and handbooks also led to a rise in syntheses in which various branches of philosophy were covered. The numerous *cursus philosophici* textbooks typically produced by the Jesuits handily covered logic, natural philosophy, and metaphysics (oddly skipping ethics), and it likewise became more common to treat all of moral philosophy together rather than offering discrete examinations of its individual branches.[50] These tendencies point to a frustration (quite familiar to us today) with "information overload" and specialization. Since treatises and systematizations often disrupted the sequence of topics found in Aristotle's writings (e.g. by placing the discussion of friendship in Book VIII of the *Ethics* together with that of the moral virtues in Books III–V), this could lead to using Aristotle's views piecemeal, which implicitly granted them less authority than when everything was ordered according to Aristotelian structures.

It is therefore not surprising that the loud sixteenth-century debates on method and order often became an important reference point in interpretations of the *Ethics*. In Padua, for example, Jacopo Zabarella and Francesco Piccolomini both noted that the *Nicomachean Ethics* starts with a discussion of the end of man (happiness) before describing the moral and intellectual virtues. But does this sequence reflect Aristotle's method of inquiry or rather his order of presentation? Do speculative and practical philosophy always require different approaches? And are modern interpreters bound by Aristotle's example or can they also choose (as Piccolomini claimed) their own starting points?[51] Discussions of this kind could range in focus from



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low-order issues (why does Aristotle treat fortitude before temperance?) to higher-order considerations. In the latter case, one problem often debated was whether moral philosophy should be studied before or after speculative philosophy. While both Benito Pereira and Theodor Zwinger thought that natural philosophy should come first, for instance, Ottaviano Ferrari and Antonio Bernardi Mirandolano thought that moral philosophy should ready the mind for contemplation.[52] As for the branches of moral philosophy itself, many interpreters questioned the traditional division into three branches, distinguishing instead only two parts – a theoretical one corresponding to the *Ethics* (in which the general principles of moral philosophy are set out) and a practical one contained in the *Politics* and *Oeconomics*. The same interpreters often objected to the traditional sequence of study, so that it generally became preferable to place oeconomics after ethics and politics rather than in between the two.[53]

## Some central issues in Renaissance ethics

We saw above that the Plato–Aristotle controversy (with its implications for the relationship of pagan and Christian ethics) colored numerous discussions of moral philosophy in the Renaissance period. This was also the case for certain specific issues that were usually covered in ethics. One of these concerned the goal of all things – and, more specifically, of ethics – which Aristotle described at the beginning of the *Ethics* as *tagathón* ("the good"). Bruni's translation of this expression as *summum bonum* ("bene ostenderunt summum bonum quod omnia appetunt") was often followed well into the sixteenth century.[54] But it also raised questions and objections. After all, if moral philosophy really deals with the supreme good, how does it differ from metaphysics and theology? And to what extent could one really expect a pagan such as Aristotle to be cognizant of Christian truth? This point also came into play when translating the Greek term *eudaimonia* (human flourishing or happiness). The two main Latin correspondents were *felicitas* and *beatitudo*. Using *felicitas* often suggested that the import of Aristotle's teachings was limited to the earthly sphere, in which case the reconciliation with Christian teachings was fairly straightforward, since the discussion of heavenly and eternal happiness would fall to Christianity. A translation such as *beatitudo*, however, often implied that Aristotle's moral teachings might be relevant for both present and future happiness; in this case, the tensions with Christianity would need to be addressed at both levels.

A closely related issue was that of the active and contemplative lives. Medieval commentators had noted Aristotle's apparent vacillation on which was superior, but usually opted for the preeminence of the contemplative life,



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something which fitted in well with the Christian monastic ideal and with the assumption that speculative disciplines were superior to practical ones. Renaissance discussions took up the issue anew as part of a reevaluation of the active life within the context of "civic humanism".[55] Although a consensus was not quickly reached, most interpreters concluded that man's status as a "social animal" demanded a more positive appraisal of his political and social dimensions. What this actually meant in terms of studying ethics, however, varied. In some cases there was a renewed emphasis on the moral virtues discussed in the *Ethics*, and especially on justice, which was regarded as the social virtue par excellence. (This was sometimes joined to an investigation of Aristotle's comments on friendship, which had social, political, and even theological implications.)[56] Other treatments of moral philosophy tended to emphasize the *Oeconomics* and *Politics*, since these works were viewed as more practical. In yet other cases there was considerable confusion as to the boundaries between ethics and politics, which of the two was more theoretical, and which was superior. Antonio Bernardi Mirandolano went so far as to identify ethics and politics – a position that earned him some heated rebuttals.

Numerous other ethical issues were discussed as well. Like honor,[57] love was intrinsically a problem for ethics, since it presupposed a purified and noble soul (rendered even more so by love itself).[58] It was a favorite topic especially among those who emphasized the role of the will in the attainment of human happiness.[59] The will was in itself an important and related subject – partly because various interpreters saw (at least some of) the moral virtues as residing in that particular faculty of the soul, and partly because of the extensive Renaissance debate on the freedom of the will.[60] Many interpreters also considered the problem of moral education: they asked, for example, at what age training in virtue ought to take place, at whose expense, and at whose initiative.[61] Finally, the relationship of virtue and pleasure was crucial for many thinkers (including Lorenzo Valla) who wished to study the claims of the various philosophical schools and compare them with Christianity. Since both Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas had seen a positive role for pleasure in the process of becoming virtuous, an obvious question was how to reconcile this with self-denial as a Christian characteristic and with the views of Epicureans and Stoics.[62]

These and many other aspects of Renaissance ethics stand in need of further exploration.[63] What is clear, however, is that – regardless of its specific place in the universities across Europe – ethics was a subject of intense interest, with connections to so many other fields that it was, in fact, central to Renaissance philosophy and culture generally. On numerous occasions ethics was taught or discussed by figures better known for their contributions in logic or rhetoric or for their expertise in natural philosophy,



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metaphysics, or medicine. Likewise, lawyers and theologians saw the natural connections between ethics and their own fields. A systematic study of the development of Renaissance ethics, and of its position vis-à-vis medieval and early modern treatments of the subject, will require further examination of these broader contexts, as well as of the traditions of Platonic, Epicurean, and Stoic ethics, which have so far received less attention than the Aristotelian.

## NOTES

1. For a short prospectus of these authors' works on the *Ethics*, see Lines 2002a, 463–71 and ch. 3.
2. Aristotle 1478. See Gionta 1992; Lines 2002a, 487–9.
3. Major 1530; Javelli 1568; Suárez (MS); see Lohr 1988, 239, 204, 445. On scholastic moral philosophy in the Renaissance see Kraye and Saarinen 2005, Part I.
4. For the editions see Lines 2002a, 461–2.
5. On Renaissance ethics see especially Kristeller 1956; Aristotle 1970, I: 147–240; Kraye 1988b; Poppi 1997; Garin 1994; and Lines (forthcoming 1). See also Rüegg and Wuttke 1979; Struever 1992; and Schneewind 1998. For primary sources Risse 1998 is very helpful.
6. There was, however, some controversy on this point as well as on the general connection between philosophy and rhetoric; see Kraye 1996.
7. See Hankins 2003–4.
8. On Tignosi's commentary and the subsequent controversy see Lines 2002a, 192–220.
9. The rhetorician in question was Giulio Valeriano, who taught rhetoric and moral philosophy from 1520 to 1528.
10. On the teaching and teachers of ethics in Florence and other Italian centers see Lines 2002a, *passim*.
11. See ibid., 45–54.
12. Several Italian teachers, including Filelfo and Tignosi, used Bruni's translation, but that of Argyropoulos was considered more precise and was soon in use even in Paris.
13. For example, in Aristotle 1497. This work was reprinted numerous times between 1497 and 1542.
14. Aristotle 1547; Muret 1602; Lambin in Aristotle 1558; Perion in Aristotle 1540.
15. Examples for Italy include Politian, Vettori, Muret and Benci; see Lines 2002a, 101–4, 243–5, 333–5, 365–6.
16. Ibid., 52–3.
17. Francesco Vimercato, *Commentarii in Ethica sive libros De moribus ad Nicomachum* (see Vimercato [MS]); F. Piccolomini 1583; see Lines 2002a, 280–1. See Jaeger 1948 for the developmental approach to Aristotle.
18. Lines 2006b.
19. Cranz 1960, 115–17; Alexander of Aphrodisias 1541.
20. Del Fante 1980, 410.
21. Muret 1602.
22. Javelli 1568.



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23. See Kraye 2004.
24. On Eustratius and his commentary see especially Mercken 1990.
25. Acciaiuoli 1478. On this work see Bianchi 1990a.
26. Florimonte 1562; Scaino 1574.
27. The most important are Lefèvre d'Étaples 1494 and 1497; both of these went through numerous editions. For the editions see Lohr 1988, 140–1.
28. Clichtovaeus 1512, fols. 18r–20v.
29. Kraye 2002b.
30. Johannes Dürrius, the editor of the work of Michael Piccart in Altdorf, made reference to two of his own predecessors, who in their teaching of moral philosophy were "obedient to this most prudent law long prescribed for the professor of Ethics by the most noble magistracy of Nuremberg, a decision we think it worthwhile to give here in full. It reads thus: 'Let the professor of moral philosophy interpret the *Ethics* of Aristotle and the *Offices* of Cicero; he should compare the teaching of philosophy on morals and the Decalogue, deriving from the latter all [his teaching] as from the fountain of all the virtues, and in passing down the virtues he should look to a Christian as well as to a political end, and let him bid [his students] carefully to relate the virtues to God and their neighbor' " (Piccart 1660, 200).
31. See Martire Vermigli 1563.
32. Lines (forthcoming 2). See also the introduction in Zwinger 1566.
33. Hankins 1990a.
34. Aquinas 1969. The work continued to be popular in the Renaissance and went through numerous printed editions. See Lines 2005b.
35. John Buridan, *Quaestiones in decem libros Ethicorum Aristotelis ad Nicomachum*. The work survives in over 100 manuscripts and was printed four times, starting in 1489 (Lines 2002a, 470–1). On moral philosophy in Cracow see Korolec 1973; for Vienna see Flüeler 2004, 92–138.
36. Lines 2002a, 173–4.
37. Ferrari's *Lectiones in X libros Ethicorum* are still in manuscript; see ibid., 513.
38. See Lines (2006c).
39. Lines 2002a, 376–83.
40. The following comments on institutional structures are based on Lines 2005a, which contains further details and bibliography.
41. Martinus 1489; Martinus 1510.
42. See Lohr 1988, 98–9 for details.
43. Collegium Conimbricense 1593.
44. For Portugal: Laurentius Fernandez, Pedro Luis, and Balthasar Álvarez (in Évora) and Marcus Georgius and Ludovicus de Molina (Coimbra). For Spain: Benedictus Arisas Montanus, OS Jac., Gaspar Cardillus de Villalpando, Johannes de Celaya, Alphonsus Martinus de Corduba, OESA, Pedrus Garcia de Galarza, Petrus de Lerma, Franciscus Suárez, SJ, and Franciscus Zumel, O. de M. For references see Lines 2005a, 48–59.
45. Traversagni (MS); Case 1585; Tempellus 1581; Tunstall 1554.
46. For the situation in Italy see also Lines 2002a, 80–108.
47. Dialogues include Landino 1980; Brucioli 1526; Landi 1564–75. Poems include Andrelinus (MS); del Bene 1609.
48. See Schmitt 1983a, 34–63; Schmitt 1988.



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49. Lefèvre d'Étaples 1494; Zwinger 1566; F. Piccolomini 1583.
50. E.g. Malfante 1586; also F. Piccolomini 1583.
51. See Lines 2002a, 254–63.
52. Pereira 1585, 13 (cap. IV); Zwinger 1566, 31; Ferrari (MS); Bernardi (MS).
53. The division of moral philosophy into two parts was advocated by many, among whom were Vermigli, Zwinger, Simoni, Giphanius, Piccart, Waele, and Accoramboni. Of these, only Simoni held out for the traditional order of study. In the fifteenth century the traditional order and division, espoused by Thomas Aquinas, was much more common.
54. Among others, it was discussed by Francesco Filelfo, Ugolino Pisani, and Francesco Piccolomini (see Lines 2002a, 296–8, 269, and *ad indicem*; Hankins 2003–4, 13–239). Several important sixteenth-century translators, however, adopted it, including Pier Vettori, Joachim Périon, and Denys Lambin.
55. See, for example, Alberti 1994; Landino 1980. On the topic see also Vickers 1991.
56. See Langer 1994.
57. This topic became one of the favorites of sixteenth-century ethical discussions; among the numerous works, see Nobili 1563.
58. See especially Ebbersmeyer 2002.
59. A famous exchange on the issue was that between Marsilio Ficino and Lorenzo de' Medici. See Ficino 1990, 201–20 and Medici 1992. See most recently Hankins 2004.
60. The debate between Erasmus and Luther is well known, but the problem was much more widely discussed than just among them; see Trinkaus 1970, I: ch. 2.
61. See Lines 2002a. Some of the most interesting works on the subject in the Italian vernacular are Brucioli 1526 and A. Piccolomini 1542.
62. On Valla's view of pleasure see Nauta (forthcoming 1).
63. See Lines (forthcoming 1).



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# 17

ERIC NELSON

# The problem of the prince

The Renaissance occupies a paradoxical place in the history of political thought. It is famous for having nurtured two diametrically opposed, although similarly extreme theoretical positions: republicanism and absolutism. Yet neither position was remotely characteristic of Renaissance political theory as a whole. The result is an understandable, but nonetheless unfortunate skewing of the literature on Renaissance political philosophy. Because republicanism and absolutism are taken to be the signal theoretical contributions of the period, and because these ideologies tend to be of most interest to contemporary scholars, they receive a disproportionate amount of attention in chapters such as this one. In contrast, the overwhelmingly dominant political ideology of the age, which might be described as princely humanism, tends to be obscured by its more celebrated, but far less ubiquitous rivals. To put the matter a bit differently, the reader of most surveys of Renaissance political thought could be forgiven for concluding that, when taken together, republicanism and absolutism accounted for close to 90 percent of published Renaissance political writings. The truth of the matter, however, is quite the reverse: taken together, these two ideologies probably accounted for less than 10 percent of the political literature of the period. The analysis which follows aims to take seriously the dominance of princely humanism in Renaissance political thought, while at the same time explaining how the various tensions within it inspired important republican and absolutist critiques.

## The problem of princely virtue

It is a matter of no small importance that the definitive statement of Francesco Petrarca's political philosophy took the form of a letter to Francesco da Carrara, the hereditary lord of Padua. Born in the Tuscan city of Arezzo, educated at Montpellier and Bologna, and a long-time resident of Milan before his final relocation to the village of Arquà, the most famous of the Italian humanists spent his entire life under the government of



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various *signori* (indeed his final patron, Carrara, spent much of his reign at war with republican Venice). The central ambition of Petrarch's political theory was to unify the warlike and fragmented Italian peninsula under the rule of a single, virtuous prince. He first put his faith in Cola di Rienzo, the revolutionary who briefly seized control of Rome in 1343, then in the Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV of Bohemia, and finally in Carrara himself (although, admittedly, he was rather less sanguine that his Paduan lord could carry out this epic task). In 1373, the year before Petrarch's death, Carrara solicited the views of his famous client on the art of governing cities, and Petrarch duly replied. His letter took the form of a *speculum principis*, a "mirror for princes," of the sort that had become the dominant genre of Italian political theory in the previous century. Earlier examples had included the anonymous *Oculus pastoralis* (1242), Giovanni da Viterbo's *De regimine principatum* (1263), Brunetto Latini's *Livres dou trésor* (1266), and, perhaps most influentially, Giles of Rome's *De regimine principum* (1277/80). These texts initially addressed the figure of the *podestà*, the elected magistrate placed in charge of the various Italian communes during the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. But as these administrators gradually came to be supplanted by *signori* in the vast majority of Italian city-states, the genre adapted accordingly. The fourteenth- and fifteenth-century *specula* tended simply to assume the superiority of princely government, and their objective was to teach princes how to govern virtuously and successfully.

Petrarch begins from the premise that princes should "lust after the treasure of virtue and win the fame of outstanding glory. This is a property that moths and rust cannot corrupt, nor can thieves steal it in the night."[1] In this, he was straightforwardly endorsing one of the central ideological commitments of ancient Roman political thought, which is hardly surprising considering that he spent the better part of his adult life promoting the Italian revival of *Romanitas*. Cicero had likewise insisted in the *De officiis* that virtue was chiefly to be prized because it was the source of "true glory,"[2] and that the purpose of civic life was the attainment of "the highest and most perfect glory."[3] One might at first suppose that the demands of glory and those of virtue might occasionally (or even chronically) conflict with each other, but Petrarch assures Carrara, once again following Cicero, that "nothing can be useful that is not at the same time just and honorable."[4] Accordingly, the first principle of rulership is that princes should wish to be loved, rather than feared. "Many princes," Petrarch explains, "both in antiquity and in modern times, have wanted nothing more than to be feared and have believed that nothing is more useful than fear and cruelty in maintaining power."[5] Yet these rulers have been deluded:



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> nothing is farther from the truth than these opinions . . . Rulers in general want to reign for a long time and to lead their lives in security, but to be feared is opposed to both of these desires, and to be loved is consistent with both. Fear is opposed both to longevity in office and security in life; goodwill favors both, and this affirmation is supported by that opinion that one can hear from Cicero [in the *De officiis*, once again].

Petrarch's formulation is clear: rulers will succeed when they are loved, and they will be loved only when they govern according to virtue. Cruelty, in contrast, leads to fear, and fear leads to failure.

But what exactly are the virtues to which rulers should direct their attention? Here Petrarch once again provides the standard Roman answers. The first virtue of sovereigns is justice, "the very important and noble function that is to give to each person his due so that no one is punished without good reason."[6] This principle, which appears in precisely the same form in the *Digest* of Roman law, has several different applications. First of all, as Petrarch indicates in the passage just quoted, it should be understood as an imperative to provide fair punishments for proven crimes. In this respect, its companion virtue is "clemency," according to which princes should "be merciful to those who have gone astray a little and who have lapsed momentarily if it can be done without encouraging their example."[7] But this form of justice is not the prince's only concern. He must also respect the private property of his subjects. Petrarch instructs Carrara that he "should avoid anyone who wants his lord to take over property at the expense of others . . . you should view persons who advise such a policy as the enemies of your good reputation and mortal soul." The reason is clear: like all injustices, expropriation yields resentment and imperils the prince. Petrarch explains that "evil courtiers" who "steal and pillage the property of others . . . bring ruin both to their lords and themselves." On similar grounds, Petrarch warns against excessive taxation and seems to believe that even poor relief should be generated from voluntary contributions alone.[8]

The strident character of this commitment to private property is once again a quintessentially Roman inheritance. Cicero lays out the classic defense of this position in the first book of the *De officiis*. "Property becomes private," he writes, in part "through long occupancy," and "each one should retain possession of that which has fallen to his lot; and if anyone appropriates to himself anything beyond that, he will be violating the laws of human society [*ius humanae societatis*]."[9] In Book Two, he adds that "the man in administrative office must make it his first care that everyone shall have what belongs to him and that private citizens suffer no invasion of their property rights by act of the state."[10] His chief example of this kind of "invasion" is that "ruinous policy" called the "agrarian law." These laws,



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designed to divide large patrician estates and to distribute the resulting parcels among the plebs, were periodically proposed by various tribunes beginning in 486 BC, and culminated in the Gracchan reforms of 133 and 123 BC. Speaking of these laws, Cicero asks, "What plague could be worse?," especially since they negate the basic purpose for which people enter civil association – namely the preservation of their private property (*custodia rerum suarum*). In *De legibus*, Cicero adds that the strife over the Gracchan laws in particular brought about "a complete revolution in the State."[11] In short, Cicero characterizes the agrarian movement as seditious, dangerous, and violently unjust. For what is an agrarian law, he asks, but an initiative "to rob one man of what belongs to him and to give to another man what does not belong to him?"[12]

Petrarch, as we have seen, reproduces this set of commitments with great exactitude, but his account of the princely virtues extends a good deal further. He also insists, for example, that rulers must practice "generosity." In the "sphere of public beneficence," he explains, "there is the restoration of temples and public buildings for which Caesar Augustus, above all others is to be praised" (note the continued dominance of the Roman example).[13] If Carrara wishes to "gain that kind of glory which all your forebears never enjoyed," he will accordingly restore the "majesty" of Padua by building roads and city walls, draining boggy marshes, and clearing the city of "rampaging herds of pigs."[14] Petrarch acknowledges that this last might seem to be "a frivolous matter," but reminds his patron that "the task of restoring Padua to its former noble majesty consists not so much in large projects as in small details." If Carrara weds justice to generosity, and adds to these humility, the lack of greed, temperance, and reverence for virtuous men, then he will govern with honor and success. But Petrarch ends on a disquieting note. Princes, he argues, "should not think they can enjoy both happiness and ease in governing; perhaps they will find happiness, but I don't think that it will happen very often."[15] The "active life" (*vita activa*) is a burden accepted out of a sense of duty; it is not the best life for a man. Addressing Carrara directly, Petrarch exclaims that he would "much prefer that you were a free private citizen than a ruling lord, for then you could live off your own wealth and you could – as an important man free from the cares of governing – enjoy a quiet and profitable prime of life and, when it came, an honorable old age."[16] But princes are denied these pleasures. Their virtue consists precisely in allowing their subjects to experience them instead.

Petrarch's political theory can, therefore, be summarized as follows: cities ought to be governed by princes who accept their office reluctantly, and who pursue glory through virtuous actions. Moreover, the world has been providentially designed in such a way that virtuous conduct will always yield pragmatically beneficial results. The good is identical to the useful, and the



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just prince is therefore always glorious. This Petrarchan analysis was repeated with remarkable fidelity by the numerous authors who composed their own "mirrors for princes" during the course of the fifteenth century. In 1468, for example, the humanist Giovanni Pontano addressed his strikingly similar treatise *De principe* to Alfonso II, the duke of Calabria. He begins by observing that "nothing is more valuable for winning the minds of subjects than a reputation for justice and piety," and then immediately adds that "would-be rulers ought to set themselves two fundamental objectives: first, that they are generous; second, that they are merciful."[17] If princes exhibit these virtues along with assorted others (such as humility and moderation), then they will be loved by their subjects. Moreover, the love of one's subjects is the foundation of security and success; as Pontano puts it, this time paraphrasing Seneca's *De clementia* 1.13.5, "a person who is well loved has less need than anyone else for an army." But he adds that, nevertheless, "no one is better supplied with troops."[18] Once again, the useful and the good are identical.

Only three years later, Bartolomeo Sacchi (Platina) would develop precisely the same arguments in his own treatise entitled *De principe*, addressed to Federico Gonzaga, the future marquis of Mantua. Unlike Petrarch and Pontano before him, Platina pauses at the start of his discourse to justify his preference for principalities over republics and aristocracies. His central claim in this respect is that "affairs go badly in a state where the many seek to better themselves."[19] "How can it happen," he asks, "that the populace, for whom rashness and desire are virtually allies and bosom companions, governs others or impels them to action with the good judgment it stands in need of itself?" Having vindicated his search for the "best prince" as an alternative, he then proceeds to repeat the substance of the princely humanist case. The prince should honor virtuous men "according to their deserts,"[20] preserve the majesty and "flourishing prosperity" of his city, behave with modesty and generosity, and "respect justice" and private property.[21] Most importantly, he should never lose sight of the fundamental truth that "just as nothing is more ruinous than to be hated, so nothing is more beneficial than to be adored and loved – something which is produced in a miraculous way by kindness, gentleness, and obligingness."[22] If he heeds this advice, he will secure "the greatest fame and glory" for his family and city.[23]

Texts in the *speculum principis* genre continued to proliferate over the next fifty years. Francesco Patrizi of Siena composed his celebrated *De regno* in the late 1470s, Giuniano Maio authored the *De maiestate* in 1492, and, in the northern European context, important examples were furnished by Erasmus' *Institutio principis christiani* (1516) and Guillaume Budé's *Livre de l'institution du Prince* (1547). There was, however, one major lacuna in Petrarch's initial argument which likewise complicated each of these later



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iterations. Recall that Petrarch had insisted that princes were to be judged based on the degree to which they embraced virtue and practiced justice. But if this is the case, then the obvious question becomes, "What are we to do when our princes do *not* govern according to virtue and justice?" Here Petrarch takes cover behind purely descriptive language. "Arms," he insists, "will not defend evil and unjust leaders from the wrath of their oppressed subjects."[24] He clearly believes, in short, that subjects do in fact rebel against unjust princes, but takes no explicit position on whether they *should* (unsurprisingly, perhaps, since he is after all writing to a prince). Later, he adds that a prince should "act as a careful guardian of the state, not as its lord" and that "rulers who act otherwise are to be judged as thieves rather than as defenders and preservers of the state."[25] But judged *by whom*? Again, Petrarch writes of the wicked Roman emperors Caligula, Commodus, and Heliogabalus that "all of these emperors merited being murdered on the spot and having their bodies thrown into the Tiber or into sewers,"[26] but he does not tell us whether subjects may justly execute such punishments. Here, then, is the Achilles' heel of Petrarch's princely humanism: he believes that rulers are to behave virtuously and justly, and he also believes that subjects are in a position to judge whether or not rulers are fulfilling their obligations. He therefore holds out the promise of accountability, but provides no account of what exactly subjects are to do when they judge that their rulers are behaving unjustly. This is a crucially undertheorized aspect of the tradition in which Petrarch was writing, and the various tensions to which it gave rise would provide much of the impetus behind republican and absolutist critiques in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

## The republican alternative 1: the neo-Roman tradition

One possible way to resolve the dilemma implicit in princely humanism is identified by Erasmus in the *Institutio* of 1516. Since a prince is no more than an "ordinary man," Erasmus asserts, "monarchy should preferably be checked and diluted with a mixture of aristocracy and democracy to prevent it ever breaking out into tyranny; and just as the elements mutually balance each other, so let the state be stabilized with a similar control."[27] In other words, participation by the many in government will ensure that rulers behave justly and virtuously, and that, if they turn to tyranny instead, the city will be able to "blunt and break the violence of one man."[28] In this passage, Erasmus is alluding to the tradition of thought we have come to know as "republicanism." Its remote origins can be traced back to the conflict between the Holy Roman Empire and the self-governing Italian communes in the late twelfth century, but it reached its full theoretical



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sophistication in the early *quattrocento*. By this time, the vast majority of the city-states had adopted signorial government, but two important exceptions remained: Florence and Venice. As these two cities came into conflict with their numerous princely rivals, their partisans began to exploit the tensions within the *speculum principis* tradition in order to defend popular regimes. This republican critique organized itself around a crucial feature of Roman political thought which had been blatantly ignored by Petrarch and his followers. Most of the surviving Roman authors were, after all, nostalgic defenders of the Roman *respublica* (the government of consuls, senate, and tribunes which ruled Rome until Augustus instituted the principate after the Battle of Actium in 31 BC), and they were accordingly anxious to assert the existence of an axiomatic relationship between virtue and liberty. Only men who governed themselves in a free state (*civitas libera*), they firmly believed, could summon the level of agency necessary for virtuous action, and, as a result, only they could acquire glory. By contrast, slaves – those unfortunates who lived in a state of dependence upon the will of their masters – became passive, demoralized and impotent in the face of tyranny.[29]

In practice, the Roman authors drew two important conclusions from this line of reasoning. The first was that only free men could be relied on to insist that their governors behave with justice and virtue. Liberty was, in short, a prerequisite of accountability. But the Roman authors went a good deal further than this. They did not simply want to argue that popular participation in government was necessary to guard against the possibility that rulers might act unjustly; they were also at pains to argue that the logic of monarchy *itself* disposes rulers to injustice and a wanton disregard for virtue. The classic formulation of this view appears in Sallust's *Bellum Catilinae*: "Because kings hold the good in greater suspicion than the wicked, and to them the merit of others is always fraught with danger," the city of Rome "was only able to rise so suddenly to her incredible level of strength and greatness once she gained her liberty, such was the thirst for glory that filled men's minds."[30] Because kings fear competition from the virtuous, virtue can only thrive in a free state. Accordingly, once the Roman people had achieved freedom and political rights, Roman virtue could become the engine of imperial glory. With the rise of factions and dictators, however, Rome returned to a state of subjection, and became "the worst and most vicious" of cities.[31] Liberty, then, served two functions in the system of thought with which we are concerned. It was, first of all, a good in and of itself. As Cicero has it in the *De officiis*, liberty is that value "for which a high-souled man should stake everything."[32] But liberty was equally important as an instrumental good: it was a prerequisite for glory. It allowed the practice of virtue, which in turn promoted both justice and internal harmony (*concordia*). And once we realize,



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in Sallust's words, that "harmony makes small states great, while discord undermines the mightiest empires,"[33] the final link in the chain of values connecting *libertas* to *gloria* comes into view.

Perhaps the most famous Renaissance recapitulation of this Roman case appears in Leonardo Bruni's *Laudatio florentinae urbis* ("Panegyric of the City of Florence"), composed in 1403–4. Although not himself a Florentine (he was born into a Guelf family in the city of Arezzo in 1370), Bruni rose to great prominence in his adoptive city, and provided a crucial voice in the propaganda war then being waged by Florence against her archrival, the duchy of Milan (although by the time he wrote the *Laudatio*, Milanese fortunes had already declined precipitously in the wake of the death of Giangaleazzo Visconti in 1402). His objective in this particular set-piece was to vindicate Florence's republican form of government, and to refute the princely humanist orthodoxies which organized the self-presentation of the Visconti dukes. After praising the physical situation of the city (in the style of the Athenian orator Aelius Aristides), Bruni turns to a description of the Florentines themselves. The first thing to note in this respect, he tells us, is that Florence's "founder is the Roman people – the lord and conqueror of the entire world."[34] "The fact that the Florentine race arose from the Roman people," he insists, "is of the utmost importance. What nation in the entire world was ever more distinguished, more powerful, more outstanding in every sort of excellence than the Roman people? Their deeds are so illustrious that the greatest feats done by other men seem like child's play when compared to the deeds of the Romans." As a result, the wealth, greatness, and global hegemony of Rome "belongs by hereditary right" to the Florentines.[35] But that is not all. Bruni hastens to add that Florence was not simply founded by Rome, but "was established at the very moment when the dominion of the Roman people flourished greatly . . . the Caesars, the Antonines, the Tiberiuses, the Neros – those plagues and destroyers of the Roman Republic – had not yet deprived the people of their liberty."[36] Florence, in short, was founded by Rome in its hour of republican triumph, when it "flourished greatly in power, liberty, genius, and especially with great citizens," before the decadence and corruption of the principate had been imposed in the wake of civil war.[37] It is, Bruni assures us, because of this fact that "the men of Florence enjoy perfect freedom and are the greatest enemies of tyrants."

It is important to recognize what a significant departure this passage represents. It had been an orthodoxy of Roman historiography throughout the medieval period that Rome achieved her true greatness under the Caesars, and that the famous republican antagonists of the emperors had simply been traitorous rebels – an account that also drew strength from Church history, which idealized the imperial *pax romana* as the great enabler



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of Christian proselytization.[38] The most celebrated formulation of this classic view appears in Dante's *Inferno*, where Caesar's assassins, Brutus and Cassius, appear in the claws of Lucifer alongside Judas Iscariot in the very lowest level of hell.[39] Here, Bruni reverses the standard reasoning. Rome, he informs us, reached its zenith as a self-governing republic, and the end of Roman liberty brought decline and corruption. The manner in which he makes this case should sound quite familiar. "Now, after the Republic had been subjected to the power of a single head, 'those outstanding minds vanished,' as Tacitus says. So it is of importance whether a colony was founded at a later date, since by then all the virtue and nobility of the Romans had been destroyed."[40] This is a straightforward repetition of the standard Roman claim: liberty makes virtue possible, and without virtue there can be no glory. Bruni would return to this theme in even more emphatic terms in his 1428 oration in praise of Nanni Strozzi:

> Praise of monarchy has something fictitious and shadowy about it, and lacks precision and solidity. Kings, the historian [Sallust] says, are more suspicious of the good than of the evil man, and are always fearful of another's virtue. Nor is it very different under the rule of a few. Thus the only legitimate constitution of the commonwealth left is the popular one, in which liberty is real, in which legal equality is the same for all citizens, in which pursuit of the virtues may flourish without suspicion.[41]

One could hardly find a more comprehensive endorsement of the case we have been considering.

At this point in the argument of the *Laudatio*, however, Bruni adds an additional consideration: cities must be governed according to justice if they are to become glorious, and it is Florence's republican constitution, he now informs us, that ensures that *iustitia* is held "most sacred in the city."[42] No Florentine magistrate "stands above the law," and "in many ways care has been taken that those upholders of the law to whom great power has been entrusted do not come to imagine that, instead of the custodianship of the citizens, a tyrannical post has been given them."[43] There is, according to Bruni, "a system of checks and balances" in the chief magistracy, so that "there are nine magistrates instead of one, and their term is for two months, not for one year. This method of governing has been devised so that the Florentine state may be well governed, since a majority will correct any errors in judgment, and the short terms of office will curb any possible insolence." Bruni goes on to describe the other magistracies, colleges, and assemblies of the republic, and concludes his analysis in ringing tones:

> Therefore, under these magistracies this city has been governed with such diligence and competence that one could not find better discipline even in a



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> household ruled by a solicitous father. As a result, no one here has ever suffered any harm, and no one has ever had to alienate property except when he wanted to. The judges, the magistrates are always on duty; the courts, even the highest tribunal is open. All classes of men can be brought to trial; laws are made prudently for the common good, and they are fashioned to help the citizens. There is no place on earth where there is greater justice open equally to everyone. Nowhere else does freedom grow so vigorously, and nowhere else are rich and poor alike treated with such equality. In this one can discern Florence's great wisdom, perhaps greater than that of other cities.[44]

Here, in sum, is Bruni's reply to the princely humanists of Milan. Justice is impossible without liberty; only free men living under a republican constitution are capable of ensuring that the rights of the *popolo* are not trod underfoot by their rulers. Petrarch's great lacuna had at long last been filled.

## The republican alternative 2: the Greek tradition

This explicitly Roman strand of republican political theory, dubbed "civic humanism" by Hans Baron and so canonically exemplified by Bruni, would find numerous defenders throughout the early modern period. But it is important to recognize that a powerful alternative approach began to be formulated in the early sixteenth century: this later ideology was equally republican, and it addressed itself to the same lacuna in the *speculum principis* tradition, but it derived its character instead from the central sources of Greek moral and political philosophy. Moreover, it adopted an overtly polemical posture toward the neo-Roman political theory of the Italian city-states. This rival vision of the republican ideal emerged out of the coterie of English scholars who organized themselves around the figure of Erasmus in the first decade of the sixteenth century: John Colet, William Grocyn, Thomas Linacre, William Lily, Richard Pace, and, most famously, Sir Thomas More. These men became the first Englishmen to learn Greek, and one of their immediate priorities was to direct their new philological skills to the task of correcting the Vulgate New Testament – a project which culminated in Erasmus' *Novum instrumentum* of 1516. This enterprise was met with charges of heresy, and sparked what can only be described as a "culture war" over Greek studies. Indeed, anti-Greek sentiment reached such a fever pitch at Oxford that bands of students calling themselves "Trojans" rampaged through the streets accosting classmates who were studying Greek.[45] The Erasmians responded to this wave of hostility by asserting the superiority of Greece over Rome, of Hellenism over Latinity, and, most notably, of Greek philosophy over its Roman counterpart. Richard Pace wrote in one polemical pamphlet that "philosophy among the Romans was



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so feeble that nothing could seem more stupid to learned ears than to compare Roman philosophers to the Greeks,"[46] and More himself agreed that, in philosophy, "the Romans wrote next to nothing."[47]

Erasmus himself explicitly identified what his circle took to be the primary vices of the Roman tradition. In the 1517 edition of his *Adages*, he complains that "the Roman law permits men to repel force with force; it permits each person to pursue what is his [*ius suum*]; it approves of commerce; it allows usury; it approves of war as a glorious thing, so long as it is undertaken for the sake of *ius*."[48] As a result, he explains, Europe has inherited two Roman pathologies: the love of glory and the love of wealth. The first issues straightforwardly in war, while the second ensures that, in Europe, "he is thought to be the best who is the richest." Indeed, Erasmus sees a powerful connection between these two corrupt systems of thought. "The happiest state of a commonwealth," he insists following Plato, "consists in the common ownership of all things . . . if it were only possible for mortals to be persuaded of this, in that very instant war, envy, and fraud would depart from our midst."[49] The contrast with the civic humanist tradition could not be more pronounced. Turning once again to the figure of Bruni, we find the following remarks put in the mouth of Pino della Tosa in the sixth book of the *History of the Florentine People* (Pino is attempting to convince the Signoria of the benefits of purchasing the city of Lucca in 1329 – a position which, we know, Bruni fully endorsed):

> Think how much the glory, fame and majesty of the Florentine People will grow if a city which has long been nearly our equal in wealth and power should be made subject to you? For my part, I confess, as one who practices the common life and moral customs of mankind, I am moved by the things that men hold to be goods: extending borders, enlarging empire, raising on high the glory and splendor of the state, assuring our own security and advantage. If we say that these are not desirable things, then the welfare of the republic, patriotism and practically this whole life of ours will be overthrown.[50]

Erasmus is indeed urging that "this whole life" of civic self-aggrandizement should be overthrown.

The most elaborate and ingenious expression of this argument was, however, More's *Utopia* (1516).[51] In this notoriously complicated text, we find a comprehensive rejection of the neo-Roman republican tradition wedded to an affirmative defense of a rival set of political values drawn from Greek philosophy. The dichotomy between Greece and Rome is made explicit from the very outset of the text. More places his description of Utopia in the mouth of Raphael Hythloday, a mysterious mariner who, we are told, is not ignorant of Latin, but is extremely learned in Greek. His main interest is philosophy,



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and "he recognized that, on that subject, nothing very valuable exists in Latin except for certain works of Seneca and Cicero."[52] When Hythloday later recommends books to the Utopians, his rejection of Roman philosophy extends even further: echoing More himself, Hythloday observes that "except for the historians and poets, there was nothing in Latin that they would value."[53] Accordingly, Hythloday gives the Utopians most of Plato's works, and some of Aristotle's – none of Cicero's or Seneca's – and continues by noting that the Utopian language is related to Greek. More amplifies this Greek commitment throughout the text with his skillful use of Greek nomenclature. "Utopia" itself is a Greek coinage, meaning "no place," and the island's cities, rivers, and government officials are all given Greek names.

All of this conspicuous Hellenism provides a powerful backdrop for More's thoroughgoing subversion of the Roman republican tradition. Following Plato in particular, but also Aristotle to some degree, More recovers and advances a very different sort of political theory. This essentially Greek ideology does not particularly value freedom as "non-domination" – living without dependence on the will of other human beings. The sort of "freedom" it values is the condition of living according to our rational nature, and it assumes that most men can only become free in this sense if they are ruled by their moral superiors (if someone ruled by his passions is left to rule himself, then he is enslaved). The Greek tradition also assumes that the purpose of civic life is not "glory" (which it dismisses as the irrelevant approval of nonexperts), but rather "happiness" (*eudaimonia*), the fulfillment of our rational nature through contemplation. Most important of all, the Greek account exhibits a sharply contrasting theory of justice. Justice, on this view, is not a matter of giving each person *ius suum* in the Roman sense, but is rather an arrangement of elements that accords with nature. In the case of the state, justice is instantiated by the rule of reason in the persons of the most excellent men – an arrangement that corresponds to the rule of reason over the appetites in the individual soul. This view of justice in turn leads to a completely anti-Roman endorsement of property regulations. If property were allowed to flow freely among citizens, both Plato and Aristotle reason, then extremes of wealth and poverty would inevitably develop. The resulting rich and poor would both be corrupted by their condition: the rich would become effeminate, luxurious, and slothful, while the poor would become criminals and lose their public spirit. Neither group would defer to the rule of the best men, and, as a result, justice would be lost. Accordingly, the Greek view recommends either the outright abolition of private property (as among the guardians in Plato's *Republic*), or, at the very least, severe regulations designed to prevent its undue accumulation (as in Plato's *Laws* and Aristotle's *Politics*).



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More replicates this set of commitments to a remarkable degree. The Utopians, we are told, have abolished private property, thus avoiding the great and pervasive injustice of European societies. Hythloday explains this decision as follows: "Wherever you have private property, and money is the measure of all things, it is hardly ever possible for a commonwealth to be just or prosperous – unless you think justice can exist where the best things are held by the worst citizens."[54] In such states, the rich become "rapacious, wicked, and useless," the poor "look out for themselves, rather than for the people," and justice is lost. The Utopians, on the other hand, have abolished private property and find it shocking that "a dunderhead who has no more brains than a post ... should command a great many wise and good men, simply because he happens to have a big pile of gold coins."[55] Accordingly, the Utopians enjoy the rule of the wise, and government is reserved exclusively for those who "from childhood have given evidence of excellent character, unusual intelligence, and a mind inclined to the liberal arts." This elite rules over the commonwealth in a mixed regime (made up of governors, senates, and assemblies), and, we are told, governs in the manner of parents raising children – an image no Roman writer would ever use to describe citizens, because children are not considered to be *sui iuris* (under the guidance of their own sovereign will).[56] The goal of Utopian life is not glory, which the Utopians disdain, but rather "happiness" (*felicitas*) – and life is organized so that "all citizens should be free to devote themselves to the freedom and culture of the mind. For in that, they think, lies the happiness of life."[57]

At the bottom of this scale of values, then, is an uncompromising claim about the relationship between property and justice. Private property, we are told, must be abolished if the wise are to rule and the state is to fulfill its nature. This, in short, is the Erasmian solution to Petrach's conundrum. More agrees with Bruni that justice can only be assured by a republican constitution, but he offers a crucial caveat. It is not simply the multiplicity of magistrates, or their limited tenure, that banishes injustice, but rather the government of the best men made possible by the absence of broad differentials in property holdings. This vision of republican politics would contend with its neo-Roman rival for the next two centuries.

## Machiavelli

Both the Greek and Roman republican traditions, as we have seen, proposed to resolve the Petrarchan dilemma in the same basic manner. Given an inevitable choice between princely rule and just rule, they each insisted that the latter should be preferred over the former. As the sixteenth century unfolded, however, there was no shortage of theorists who wished to resolve



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the dilemma in the opposite direction. They would claim that princely rule should be maintained even in the event that the prince is serially unjust. Civic peace and imperial glory should be preferred to justice in the event that these goals were seen to issue conflicting demands. The Petrarchan tradition, of course, had denied the possibility of such conflict; it had insisted that, when seen in the proper perspective, the *honestum* was always identical to the *utile*. But writers of the *cinquecento* came increasingly to doubt this piety. The single most important text to challenge the humanist orthodoxy in this regard was a slim work by a disgraced former official of the defunct Florentine republic, who wrote seeking patronage from his new Medici overlords in 1513. The official's name was Niccolò Machiavelli, and he called his little book *The Prince*.

As Machiavelli would make clear several years later in his *Discourses on Livy* (written between 1515 and 1519), he did not hold the view that princely regimes were superior to all others; indeed, he states explicitly in the second discourse that republics ought in fact to be preferred on the grounds that "cities have never expanded either in dominion or in riches if they have not been in freedom."[58] The reason, Machiavelli insists, is that "it is not the particular good but the common good that makes cities great. And without doubt this common good is not observed if not in republics."[59] The willingness to do what is necessary to advance the common good, and thereby acquire glory for the city, is virtue (*virtù*), which for Machiavelli explains why monarchies cannot compete with republics. After freedom is replaced by princely rule, he argues, cities "go backward" because a prince "cannot honor any of the citizens he tyrannizes over who are able and good since he does not wish to have suspicion of them." This passage, as we have seen, is a straightforward paraphrase of Sallust's famous observation in the *Bellum Catilinae*. It is, on this account, in the nature of princely government to repress virtue and to invite flattery and corruption. *Libertà*, on the other hand, breeds *virtù* and leads to *grandezza*. As Machiavelli puts it later in the *Istorie Fiorentine*, "from order comes virtue, and from this comes glory and good fortune."[60]

What is important to note, however, is that Machiavelli does *not* argue for the superiority of republics on the conventional grounds that they are more just than principalities. Indeed, he goes out of his way in both the *Discourses* and the *Prince* to insist that justice should be *rejected* as a political value. Experience had taught him that the *honestum* was not always *utile*; if one is serious about doing whatever is necessary in order to secure glory, one must "be prepared to act immorally when this becomes necessary."[61] Machiavelli recognizes that this view has been emphatically rejected by "the many people who have written about this subject" before him (that is, the many authors



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who had penned *specula* during the course of the *quattrocento*), but he insists that these authors have simply "imagined republics and principalities that have never been seen or known to exist." His own goal, in contrast, is to "set aside fantasies about rulers" and consider "the way things actually are" (*la verità effetuale*).[62] In the real world, we do not always, or even often, acquire *gloria* and *grandezza* by practicing justice and the moral virtues. The humanists, for example, had preached the virtue of "generosity," but Machiavelli replies that the prince known for generosity must "spend lavishly and ostentatiously," and must accordingly raise taxes, incurring hatred and imperiling his rule.[63] The humanists had also insisted that it was better to be loved than feared, and that cruelty could never profit a prince. Machiavelli counters that the notorious Cesare Borgia "was considered cruel," but that his "harsh measures restored order to the Romagna, unifying it and rendering it peaceful and loyal."[64] His own conclusion is that "it is much safer to be feared than loved," because "love is sustained by a bond of gratitude which, because men are excessively self-interested, is broken whenever they see a chance to benefit themselves. But fear is sustained by a dread of punishment that is always effective."[65] Perhaps most importantly, the humanists had insisted that princes ought to keep their word and eschew force and fraud, ritualistically repeating Cicero's dictum from the *De officiis* that "wrong may be done in either of two ways, that is, by force or by fraud; both are bestial: fraud seems to belong to the cunning fox, force to the lion; both are wholly unworthy of man."[66] Machiavelli counters that "rulers who have done great things have set little store by keeping their word, being skillful rather in cunningly deceiving men."[67] He concludes with biting satire that a ruler must, after all, "know well how to imitate beasts . . . he should imitate both the fox and the lion."

Machiavelli's conclusion, in short, is that the imperative of rulers, whether they are princes or republican magistrates, is to maintain the peace of the city at home and maximize their share of glory abroad. If these are the highest civic values, then justice has no important place in political theory. It is the ruler's prerogative to decide when to "imitate beasts," and, no matter his degree of wickedness or immorality, he is to be excused so long as the twin goals of peace and greatness are being achieved. With the formulation of this position, the doctrine which we have come to know as "absolutism" was born.

## The theory of absolutism: Bodin

Yet it is essential to realize that absolutists did not necessarily have to contend, with Machiavelli, that princes were under no obligation to act



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justly. Indeed, the most famous sixteenth-century defense of the absolutist idea, that of the Frenchman Jean Bodin, is notable for illustrating how a thinker could reject the view that princes should feel free to behave unjustly and yet nonetheless conclude with Machiavelli that justice is, in the final analysis, irrelevant to politics. Bodin wrote his celebrated brief for undivided sovereignty, the *Six Books of the Republic*, in 1576 at the height of the French wars of religion. Although earlier in his career, notably in the 1566 *Method for the Easy Comprehending of History*, he had embraced a moderate form of constitutionalism, the Huguenot revolt of 1572–4 had convinced him that the crucial goal of statecraft must be to "seek after a convenient and decent order, and deem nothing to be more ugly or foul to look upon than confusion and broil" (he had, after all, personally witnessed the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre in 1572).[68] His primary target in the *Six Books* is, accordingly, the Huguenot theory of resistance, as it had been set out in detail by the prince de Condé, François Hotman, Simon Goulart, and others during the early 1570s.[69] Bodin writes emphatically in the *Six Books* that sovereigns must be endowed with absolute power, and insists that "sovereignty given to a prince subject to obligations and conditions is properly not sovereignty."[70] The clear implication of this view, he explains, is that it is contrary to the very notion of civil authority to allow subjects the right to oppose or resist their monarch:

> If the prince is sovereign absolutely, as are the genuine monarchs of France, Spain, England, Scotland, Ethiopia, Turkey, Persia, and Muscovy – whose power has never been called into question and whose sovereignty has never been shared with subjects – then it is not the part of any subject individually, or all of them in general, to make an attempt on the life of the monarch, either by way of force or by way of law, even if he has committed all the misdeeds, impieties, and cruelties that one could mention. As to the way of law, the subject has no right of jurisdiction over his prince, on whom all power and authority to command depends.[71]

Bodin thus offers a juridical argument for obedience, but, as he makes clear later in the text, his true concern is not legal but prudential. Absolute sovereignty is chiefly to be granted because it is required for the preservation of civic peace. "It is never permissible," Bodin repeats, "for a subject to attempt anything against a sovereign prince, no matter how wicked and cruel a tyrant he may be ... For oh, how many tyrants there would be if it were lawful to kill them! He who taxes too heavily would be a tyrant ... he who maintains guards for security would be a tyrant; he who punishes conspirators against his rule would be a tyrant."[72] Allowing every subject to act upon his own personal convictions as to what constitutes "tyranny" and "injustice" would plunge the state into anarchy.



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At no point, however, does Bodin deny the objective intelligibility of justice, nor does he embrace the Machiavellian view that sovereigns may occasionally act unjustly for the sake of peace and glory – he is, therefore, a deeply conflicted figure. He states explicitly that "as for divine and natural laws, every prince on earth is subject to them, and it is not in their power to contravene them unless they wish to be guilty of treason against God . . . The absolute power of princes and of other sovereign lordships, therefore, does not in any way extend to the laws of God and of nature."[73] In particular, Bodin is at pains to argue that a prince is "not able to take another's property without just and reasonable cause."[74] He therefore tries to leave ample room in his theory for the principle of justice; but in denying that the injustice of a prince ought to have any remedy in the political sphere, he so subordinates considerations of justice to the demands of civic preservation that he renders the former essentially irrelevant. The sins of a sovereign, he proclaims, are a matter to be taken up by God on the last day; on earth, the preservation of peace requires that we relinquish our right to pass judgment. This, then, is the absolutist reply to the moderate tradition of princely humanism. Its apotheosis would come in the writings of the notorious "Monster of Malmesbury" who would insist a century later that, for the sake of peace, we must all surrender our rights of judgment to a "mortal god" called the State. In the journey from Petrarch to Hobbes, Europe lost the middle ground.

## NOTES

1. All quotations from Petrarch's *Qualis esse debeat qui rem publicam regit* are taken from Benjamin Kohl's translation in Kohl and Witt 1978. This passage appears on 61. Note that Petrarch is providing a fairly subversive adaptation of Matthew 6:19 ("Do not store up for yourselves treasure on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and thieves break in and steal; but store up treasure in heaven, where neither moth nor rust will destroy, nor thieves break in and steal.") The evangelist, needless to say, would not have equated "the fame of outstanding glory" with "treasure in heaven." See also Luke 12:33.
2. Cicero, *De officiis* II.12.43. Translated in Cicero 1913, 211.
3. Cicero, *De officiis* II.9.31. Cicero 1913, 199.
4. Kohl and Witt 1978, 63.
5. Ibid., 42.
6. Ibid., 48.
7. Ibid., 49.
8. On excessive taxation, see ibid., 59; on poor relief, see 68.
9. Cicero, *De officiis* I.7.21. Cicero 1913, 23.
10. Cicero, *De officiis* II.21.73. Cicero 1913, 249.
11. Cicero, *De legibus* III.9.20. Translated in Cicero 1928, 483.
12. Cicero, *De officiis* II.23.83. Cicero 1913, 261.
13. Kohl and Witt 1978, 49.



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14. Ibid., 50–2.
15. Ibid., 64.
16. Ibid., 71.
17. Quotations from Pontano's *De principe* are taken from Nicholas Webb's translation in Kraye 1997, vol. II. This passage is found at II: 70.
18. Ibid., II: 76.
19. Quotations from Platina's *De principe* are taken from Nicholas Webb's translation in Kraye 1997, vol. II. This passage appears at II: 89.
20. Ibid., II: 93.
21. Ibid., II: 94, 98.
22. Ibid., II: 94.
23. Ibid., II: 101.
24. Kohl and Witt 1978, 47.
25. Ibid., 55.
26. Ibid., 69.
27. Erasmus 1986, 231. The translation is Neil M. Cheshire's.
28. Ibid.
29. On the neo-Roman view of liberty, see Skinner 2001. See also Skinner 2002, 10–38.
30. Sallust, *Bellum Catilinae* VII.2. Translated in Sallust 1921, 13.
31. Sallust, *Bellum Catilinae* V.9. Sallust 1921, 11.
32. Cicero, *De officiis* I.20.68. Cicero 1913, 71.
33. Sallust, *Bellum Iugurthinum* X.6. Sallust 1921, 149.
34. Quotations from Bruni's *Laudatio* are taken from Ronald G. Witt's translation in Kohl and Witt 1978. This passage appears on 149.
35. Ibid., 150.
36. Ibid., 151.
37. Ibid., 154.
38. Baron 1955, I: 39.
39. Dante 1960, 677.
40. Kohl and Witt 1978, 154.
41. Quoted in Hankins 2000b, 172.
42. Kohl and Witt 1978, 169.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid., 173.
45. On this episode, and the broader conflict over Greek studies, see Nelson 2004, 22–34. See also Goldhill 2002 and Saladin 2000.
46. Pace 1967, 128.
47. More 1986, 220.
48. Erasmus 1517. The translation is taken from Nelson 2004, 33.
49. Erasmus 1993, 84, 61.
50. Bruni 2001–4, II: 159 (VI.5).
51. The analysis of *Utopia* which follows is based upon the more extensive treatment in Nelson 2004, 19–48.
52. More 1995, 45.
53. Ibid., 181.
54. Ibid., 101.
55. Ibid., 155.



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56. Ibid., 147.
57. Ibid., 135.
58. Machiavelli 1996, 129.
59. Ibid., 130.
60. Machiavelli 1963, 773. The translation is my own.
61. Machiavelli 1988, 55.
62. The translation of this last phrase is my own; Price translates "what happens in fact."
63. Ibid., 56.
64. Ibid., 58.
65. Ibid., 59.
66. Cicero, *De officiis* 1.13.41. Cicero 1913, 45.
67. Machiavelli 1988, 61.
68. Bodin 1962, 386.
69. The classic account of this debate is found in Skinner 1978, 238–301.
70. Bodin 1992, 8.
71. Ibid., 115.
72. Ibid., 120.
73. Ibid., 13.
74. Ibid., 40.



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# 18

JAMES HANKINS

# The significance of Renaissance philosophy

Since the 1930s, when it first emerged as a distinctive field of research, intellectual history has always been fascinated with the Renaissance. Intellectual historians are concerned with unearthing the deep, often half-conscious patterns of thought that govern the way individuals understand and act within nature and society. They examine how traditions of thought situate themselves within changing linguistic and cultural settings. Lately they have begun to focus on the history of learned disciplines, intellectual routines, and practices. Above all they are concerned with the question of why large groups of human beings change their beliefs over time. This being the case, it is easy to see why the Renaissance attracts the intellectual historian. It was a period when fundamental changes occurred in Western societies across a wide range of beliefs, religious, scientific, political, historical, and anthropological. Christendom disintegrated and sovereign states emerged. The Catholic Church lost much of its authority and new Protestant churches and sects appeared. Religious divisions and wars led to the first tentative expressions of the need for tolerance and freedom of expression. Educational ideals and practice were transformed. Humanists arose to challenge the hegemony of scholastic culture. Christian culture underwent a major reorientation in its attitude to the pagan culture of Graeco-Roman antiquity. Republicanism and absolutism crystallized into distinct traditions of political thought. Major changes occurred in how Europeans saw and analyzed human nature, the cosmos, and natural processes. The sciences grew less interested in contemplating nature and more interested in controlling it. A New World was discovered full of societies, flora, and fauna utterly unknown to Western learned traditions. The invention of printing – the information revolution of the fifteenth century – altered fundamentally the conditions under which knowledge-workers operated, making possible the collection, collation and analysis of information in ways and on a scale hitherto unimaginable. The sheer volume of new information and the variety of perspectives on offer, the religious quarrels of the time, not to mention the seductive power of ancient



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thinkers like Cicero and Sextus Empiricus, inevitably led to a resurgence of skepticism and fideism, and *pari passu* to a new concern with method and the reliability of knowledge. So it is hardly surprising that the intellectual historian views the Renaissance as an extraordinarily well-stocked workshop for the practice of his craft.

The same is not true of philosophers and historians of philosophy. For philosophers the period of the Renaissance has often seemed a kind of valley between two hills. On one hill sit the great scholastic philosophers – Aquinas, Scotus, Ockham – great system builders and brilliant analysts of language, logic, and metaphysics. On the other hill sit the great system builders of the seventeenth century, Descartes, Hobbes, Leibniz, and Spinoza, men who can reasonably be described as belonging to the world of modern thought. In between lies a swampland inhabited by what seem mere epigones of the great scholastics, by sententious moralizers and *littérateurs*, by philologists and compilers, by wild-eyed magicians and *Naturphilosophen*, as fertile in propagating new ideas as they were incapable of defending them. Cusanus, Machiavelli, perhaps Valla, are acknowledged to be major thinkers, though in very different ways, but they are hardly enough to redeem the period from its reputation as a philosophical wasteland. Cusanus' work seems more relevant to theology than philosophy; Machiavelli is more of a political scientist than a political philosopher; Valla's major work of philosophy is available only in Latin and is in any case situated in the unfamiliar terrain of classical philology. It is no wonder that philosophers concerned with the history of their discipline are tempted to leap airily from one hill to the other rather than slog through the swamps below. Nor is it surprising that courses on Renaissance philosophy remain rare in departments of philosophy.

Part of the reason why intellectual historians and philosophers differ so much in the value they put upon Renaissance thought lies in the uses each academic community makes of past thinkers. What intellectual historians typically seek out in the past is the unfamiliar and the strange, for these are their best clues to understanding alien modes of thought. What philosophers seem to want from the past is (in Richard Rorty's phrase) "conversational partners." With publicly defined positions already staked out, they explore the famous names of the past to see what light they can shed on the problems of their own field. They might hope to elaborate their taxonomies of available positions or refine existing positions, but fundamentally they are looking for thinkers whose *forma mentis* is similar to their own. Philosophers interested in the mind–body problem can converse (or so they believe) with Descartes and Hobbes. But they can make little of philosophers like Ficino or Patrizi who believed that mind–body interactions were mediated by fine-material *spiritus* – a *tertium quid* described with great confidence by Galen



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but which cannot be detected by modern scientific instruments. Worse, behind the idea of *spiritus* lies a trinitarian psychology drawn from Augustine, which seems to import an element of the a priori from religious dogma.[1] Descartes's theory of the pineal gland, unsatisfactory as it is either philosophically or scientifically, at least seems to have some bearing on the modern construction of the mind–body problem. In principle it is falsifiable and not dependent on authority or Christian metaphysical cartoons for its validity. The same cannot be said of Ficino's *spiritus*, "that subtle knot which makes us man," so subtle as to be invisible under lasar microscopy.

As an intellectual historian, one might observe that the apparent rationality of philosophers like Descartes is only apparent, and that more historically informed studies of Descartes disclose an unacknowledged dependence on traditional sources – including Augustine – and a whole web of theological assumptions holding the philosophical reasoning in place.[2] One could also remark that the "famous names of the past" are famous for a reason, and a large part of that reason has to do with the hierarchy of institutions and nations and social classes and patterns of discipleship and transmission.[3] This, however, does not affect the main issue, that modern philosophers cannot converse with philosophers of the past unless they share certain assumptions about philosophical discourse. The fundamental commitment of modern academic philosophy is to a methodology, a certain mode of argumentation, and that mode excludes arguments depending for their validity on religious dogma, unquestionable authorities, unexamined metaphysical assumptions, or outdated science. By this test Descartes and Hobbes still count as modern philosophers and Ficino and Patrizi do not.

One can of course subject the modern mode of philosophical argument itself to a historical critique, and show that what today counts as "rational" is itself historically contingent. Famous philosophers like Michel Foucault, Richard Rorty, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Stephen Toulmin have archeologized modern reason in this way.[4] This gets us closer to an argument for the utility to philosophers of studying Renaissance philosophy. Few philosophers would deny that modern philosophy benefits from an awareness of the assumptions underlying its enterprise. To be sure, the fact that a particular form of rationality appears at some historical moment does not in itself show that it is false, just as the universality of a belief does not show that it is true. But it should be obvious that one useful way to make sense of modern forms of rationality is to study them (as Aristotle would say) in the process of their growth. This means (as Ernst Cassirer and Richard Popkin already saw) studying the Renaissance and especially its ideas of rationality and method.

The larger point is that if the study of Renaissance philosophy is to benefit modern philosophers, they – we – will have to approach it, as one should



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always approach the past, with a certain humility and respect. To search merely for partners who can join in modern conversations, dismissing out of hand those who speak in other philosophical languages, inevitably limits debate. It turns philosophy into anachronistic monologue; we talk only to ourselves. It also falsifies the past; to find Wittgenstein in Valla is to mutate *non mutanda*.[5] But approached in the right spirit, with patience and a sense of history, the Renaissance can offer certain lessons. When we attend to the historical situation of Renaissance philosophy and what Renaissance philosophers themselves hoped to accomplish, we might even be prepared to admit certain resemblances between that age and our own. We might even see the philosophers of the Renaissance as persons who have walked down paths we ourselves now travel and who can to some degree act as guides to unfamiliar country.

But what were Renaissance philosophers up to, and how might their goals and achievements be relevant to contemporary philosophy?

The most obvious fact about Renaissance philosophers is that the best of them – humanists, scholastics and "new philosophers" alike – were determined to break out of the narrow range of approved Aristotelian textbooks that had provided the fare of thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century scholastic philosophy. Prodded by humanists, university philosophers tried to enhance the quality of their teaching by learning Greek, by improving the quality of translations and by acquiring a much more thorough knowledge of the ancient, Muslim, Jewish and medieval Christian commentary tradition. Despite some noisy controversies, most scholastics were remarkably unprejudiced when it came to reading the work of Aristotelian commentators in other faith traditions. This was already true in the Middle Ages and it became even truer in the Renaissance. Outside the universities, humanists were busily engaged in recovering the heritage of ancient pagan philosophy and theology, reconstructing and promoting as philosophical alternatives ancient Platonism, skepticism, Epicureanism, and Stoicism. New philosophers like Marsilio Ficino, Pico della Mirandola, and Francesco Patrizi were trying to recover what they thought was the theosophical wisdom of ancient Egypt, Persia, Greece, and Israel. In the New World and the Far East, Catholic missionaries trained in Europe's philosophy classrooms were studying the religion and philosophy of native peoples in Latin America, Japan, China and South Asia. Many of them learned that to convert others to one's own faith, even when backed by the sword, requires a kind of conversion of one's own. Everywhere one senses a profound dissatisfaction with the existing resources of European intellectual life and a determination to appropriate the wisdom and knowledge of other cultures and religions.



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The bewildering flood of new arguments, new texts, and new perspectives, whose impact was vastly multiplied through the printing press, enforced radical rethinkings of Christianity and what it meant to be a Christian. Christianity both as a lived tradition and as a textual tradition of course had been subject to reinterpretation from its earliest days, but the sheer volume of new non-Christian texts, whose recovery coincided with the waning authority of the Catholic magisterium, placed unique stresses on the dogmatic structures upholding Christian identity. Philosophers took the lead in helping Christian society evolve towards new self-understandings. Many adopted conservative or compromise positions, but there were also many who sought to use ancient philosophical theology or new science to bring about a thorough reform of, and even a rebellion against, traditional dogmas and authorities. Others like Cusanus, Ficino, and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola sought to civilize an exclusivist Christianity by opening it up to wisdom from other faith traditions;[6] still others, like Sebastian Castellio and Montaigne, pioneered new conceptions of tolerance for religious and cultural diversity.[7] Erasmus challenged the crusading ideal and other humanists espoused irenic and relativistic attitudes even towards the Turks, the greatest external threat to Western societies in the Renaissance.[8] That Western society did not go the way of Islamic societies in this period owes much to the commitment of Renaissance philosophers to seeking out and defending, sometimes at the cost of their lives and reputations, truth wherever it could be found.[9]

This is, indeed, another striking characteristic of Renaissance philosophers: the degree of their engagement with the world, their zeal for reform. The humanist movement first gained moral authority when Petrarch gave it the purpose of inculcating virtue and eloquence. Humanists were in principle committed to nurturing the patriotism, prudence, and civic virtue of social elites by holding up to them idealized images of ancient heroes and sages. In so doing they changed, once again, the exclusivist attitudes of the Christian world to another culture, in this case the culture of Graeco-Roman antiquity. That is why they put clarity and persuasion first and despised technical, specialized debate. It was another humanist thinker, Thomas More, who initiated the tradition of utopian literature, which became a powerful vehicle for social criticism and reform. But scholastic philosophers could be engaged with the world around them as well. Throughout the Renaissance and beyond both humanist and scholastic professors manifested a firm, if perhaps misplaced, belief that public lecture courses on texts like Cicero's *On Duties* and Aristotle's *Ethics* could work positive change in the towns and cities of Europe.[10] Scholastic philosophers in the Hispanic tradition used their high prestige to elaborate moral frameworks with the aim of restraining



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Spanish militarism and colonial exploitation. They expanded vastly the medieval tradition of applying moral philosophy to economic life. New philosophers like Cusanus and Bessarion were actively involved in achieving reconciliation between the Eastern and Western Christian churches and in organizing the defense of Christendom against the Turkish threat. Ficino acted as a spiritual guide to several generations of Florentine patricians. Campanella tried to establish a utopian community in southern Italy and wrote from prison a brave defense of Galileo and *libertas philosophandi*. Educational reform was a constant interest of nearly all Renaissance philosophers. It would be absurd to pretend that all the political, educational and cultural activities of Renaissance thinkers are ones that can still be admired today, but the fact of their involvement in the world and their desire to apply their philosophical learning and acumen to problems of their world cannot be doubted.

Equally remarkable and innovative was the concern of Renaissance philosophers with the history and character of their own discipline. It was only natural in a period when so many new philosophical systems and ideas were being introduced that philosophers should become interested in collecting and classifying data on the history of philosophy. The latter half of the sixteenth century saw a remarkable explosion of this type of study. Ancient histories of philosophy were recovered and new ones written; fragments of lost philosophical works were collected and arranged.[11] Texts were edited to ever higher standards and a range of new, more accurate translations made available. Among the "new philosophies" of the late Renaissance must be numbered the philosophies newly recovered from the ancient world, philosophies whose systematic structure was only then beginning to be understood. If the question is asked, as it so often is, who count as the great philosophers produced by the Renaissance, a complete answer would have to include Aristotle, Plato, Plotinus, Sextus Empiricus, and Marcus Aurelius, among others.

In addition to recovering the philosophical heritage of antiquity, Renaissance philosophers also tried to achieve a wider view of the philosophical enterprise in human history. Opponents of scholasticism told new stories about philosophy's history to counter the Aristotelian model of Greek philosophical development, according to which earlier philosophy culminated in and was superseded by the Aristotelian system. Against this self-serving account Ficino told a new story, about how a profound ancient theological wisdom had been occluded by the rise of a less spiritual philosophy, Aristotle's, leading inevitably to a sundering of piety and philosophy. But a new age was coming, he predicted, when the revival of Platonism would reunite philosophy and religion.[12] Giovanni Pico della Mirandola



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had another answer for the Aristotelians: his more Plotinian view was that there was one unitary divine wisdom for all times and places which in all times and places was available to the human intellect conscious of its own divinity. Eventually philosophers like Bruno, Campanella, Bacon, and Descartes – in radically different ways – would hold out the dazzling prospect of new undreamed-of progress in philosophy, of surpassing the ancients.[13]

Philosophers also devoted considerable thought to the question of what philosophy was for and its proper relationship with religion. If Augustine in *On True Religion* had understood Christianity to be a new kind of philosophical life that was rapidly replacing the need for the spiritual disciplines of pagan philosophy, if Thomas Aquinas and medieval theologians generally had demoted philosophy to serve as the handmaiden of theology, philosophers from the second half of the thirteenth century onwards had raised the possibility that philosophy could recover its ancient autonomy and offer its own, this-worldly form of happiness.[14] The rational religion of the philosophers, some hoped, might even in the end replace that of the dogmatists. It was this vision of philosophy that ultimately brought Giordano Bruno to the stake in 1600. The challenge of humanism to scholasticism brought with it still another conception of philosophy, a Ciceronian or Quintilianic one in which philosophy was deemed to be one of several civil sciences, oriented to the active life and the tasks of ruling the *respublica*.[15] Protestantism, on the other hand, attacked the tradition of philosophical theology and undermined the ideal of philosophy as self-mastery, as an autonomous path to happiness. Other philosophers, driven underground by persecution, nurtured in secret the idea of philosophy as an esoteric wisdom, a learned magic that gave access to occult powers in nature and the human soul. Finally, the division of Europe into warring confessional camps hastened the transformation of philosophy into a mere body of doctrines or set of positions, eclipsing its ancient role as a way of life.[16]

In short, Renaissance philosophy offers many parallels with the philosophy of our own time. In our era too we have seen the fracturing and crisis of authoritive traditions, a new pluralism of philosophical perspectives, an unsettling information revolution, and passionate aspirations to integrate into philosophical discourse the wisdom literature of non-Western traditions. We too have philosophers hostile to system and rigorous demonstration who doubt the possibility of apodictic argument, philosophers who would prefer to see philosophy become a form of psychic therapy or a civil conversation or a form of persuasion and edification. We too have our skeptics and fideists; we too have those who search in philosophy's past for alternative visions of the philosophical life. We too have philosophers fiercely committed to a wide range of positions on the proper relationship between



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faith and reason. We too have philosophers who aim to influence public deliberation and shape public life. If Renaissance philosophy does not promise the immediate profit of some other periods in the history of thought, if it does not always offer ready-made arguments and insights useful in current academic debates, it nevertheless offers what can be the most revealing insight of all – the insight that comes from looking in a mirror.

## NOTES

1. Boenke 2005.
2. Menn 1998a; Ariew 1999.
3. Collins 1998. An interesting discussion of the historical reasons why Renaissance philosophers enjoy less prestige today than those of the seventeenth century is in Copenhaver and Schmitt 1992, ch. 6.
4. Foucault 1971, Rorty 1979, MacIntyre 1984, Toulmin 1990.
5. See Waswo 1987 and the critiques in Monfasani 1994.
6. Hankins 2006b. For the Christian study of Judaism see Coudert and Shoulson 2004.
7. Nederman and Laursen 1996.
8. Musto 1991; Hankins 1995; Bisaha 2004.
9. For a comparison with the Islamic world, which remained comparatively exclusivist in religion and incurious about the non-Muslim world, see Lewis 2003.
10. See chapter 16 above and the critique of this view by MacIntyre 2006.
11. See Hankins and Palmer 2007 for many examples.
12. Hankins 1990a; Blair 2000a.
13. Bottin *et al.* 1993.
14. Bianchi 2003, ch. 2.
15. See Barbaro and Pico della Mirandola 1998, 23–31.
16. See chapter 12 in this volume and Condren, Hunter and Gaukroger 2006.



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# APPENDIX: BRIEF BIOGRAPHIES OF RENAISSANCE PHILOSOPHERS

The following short biographies have been reprinted, with permission, from the 139 biobibliographies published in *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, edited by Charles B. Schmitt, Quentin Skinner, Eckhard Kessler, and Jill Kraye (1988). Some minor changes have been made and the bibliographical information included there has been omitted.

ACCIAIUOLI, DONATO b. Florence, 1429; d. Milan, 1478. Italian humanist and philosopher. Educated in Florence; strongly influenced by John Argyropoulos. Florentine statesman and ambassador. Wrote commentaries on Aristotle's *Ethics, Politics, Physics*, and *De anima*. Translated Plutarch's lives of Scipio and Hannibal.

AGRICOLA, RUDOLPH (Rudolphus Frisius; Roelof Huysman) b. Baflo near Groningen, 1443/4; d. Heidelberg, 1485. Dutch humanist. Studied at universities of Erfurt and Louvain, where he graduated MA, 1465. Traveled to Italy 1469–79 with interruptions, studying at Pavia and Ferrara. Returning to northern Europe in 1479, he promoted Italian humanism and lectured at Heidelberg, 1484–5. Wrote the influential *De inventione dialectica* (1479), as well as commentaries (Boethius, Seneca the Elder), humanistic orations, poems, letters, and translations from Greek.

AGRIPPA, HENRICUS CORNELIUS (Agrippa von Nettesheim) b. near Cologne, 1486; d. Grenoble, 1535. German philosopher. Studied at University of Cologne. Traveled widely (France, Spain, England, Germany, Italy, Switzerland) as soldier, physician, teacher. Served as doctor and astrologer to queen mother of France in Lyons, 1524; then as historian and librarian to Margaret of Austria in Antwerp, 1528–30. Returned to Cologne, then to France. Wrote influential treatise on magic, *De occulta philosophia* (1510; enlarged edition 1533); also *De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum atque artium declamatio* (1526), rejecting all human knowledge, and advocating instead faith in divine revelation. Influenced by Neoplatonism, Lullism, Hermeticism, Cabalism.



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ARGYROPOULOS, JOHN b. Constantinople, *c.* 1415; d. Rome, 1487. Byzantine philosopher. Attended Council of Ferrara/Florence, 1438–9. Studied arts and medicine at Padua, 1441–4. Taught philosophy at Constantinople, 1448–52. After the fall of Constantinople, traveled widely in Europe, 1453–6. Lectured on Greek philosophy, especially Aristotle, in Florence, 1456–71 and 1477–81; and Rome, 1471–7 and 1481–7. Translated several Aristotelian works into Latin: *Nicomachean Ethics*, *De anima*, *Physics*, *De caelo, Metaphysics* (Books 1–12 only), *De interpretatione*, *Prior* and *Posterior Analytics, Categories*; also translated pseudo-Aristotelian *De mundo* and *Isagoge* of Porphyry.

BARBARO, ERMOLAO (Almorò; Hermolaus Barbarus) b. Venice, 1454; d. Rome, 1493. Italian humanist, politician, diplomat. Early education in Venice and Rome. Studied at University of Padua: doctorate in arts 1474 and law 1477. Taught Aristotelian moral philosophy at Padua, 1474–6. Opened private school in Venice, 1484. Active in Venetian political life; several diplomatic missions. Elected Patriarch of Aquileia, 1491. In exile at Rome, 1491–3. Translated Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and Themistius' *Paraphrases Aristotelis*. Translated and commented on Dioscorides. Wrote philological commentaries on Pliny and Pomponius Mela. Engaged in epistolary controversy with Giovanni Pico della Mirandola about the relative status of rhetoric and philosophy.

BODIN, JEAN b. Angers, 1530; d. Laon, 1596. French political philosopher. His *Les six livres de la république* (1576) on the definition and limits of sovereignty exercised wide influence; opposed both the sovereignty of the people and the doctrine of absolutism attributed to Machiavelli. His *Colloquium heptaplomeres* (1587) incorporated a plea for natural religion and religious tolerance. Also wrote on historical method: *Methodus ad facilem historiarum cognitionem* (1566); and sorcery: *De la démonomanie des sorciers* (1580).

BRUNI, LEONARDO (Leonardo Aretino) b. Arezzo, *c.* 1370; d. Florence, 1444. Italian civic humanist, translator, and historian. Secretary to papal Curia, 1405–15. Chancellor of the Florentine Signoria, 1427–44. Translated many Greek authors into Latin (e.g. Aristotle, Plato, Plutarch, Xenophon, Polybius, Procopius); his translations of the *Nicomachean Ethics, Politics*, and *Oeconomics* were widely diffused in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Wrote life of Aristotle (1430); *Laudatio Florentinae urbis* (*c.* 1403/4); *Historiarum Florentini populi libri XII* (*c.* 1416 – *c.* 1442); a life of Dante; *Isagogicon moralis disciplinae* (*c.* 1425); letters; poems.

BRUNO, GIORDANO b. Nola, 1548; d. Rome, 1600. Italian humanist and philosopher. Entered Dominican monastery at Naples, studying theology and classical literature, 1563. In 1576 suspected of heresy; fled to Rome and



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afterwards other Italian cities. At Geneva in 1578, but soon quarreled with the Calvinists. Visited Toulouse 1579–81 (degree in theology, lectured on Aristotle) and Paris 1581–3, publishing *Ars memoriae*, *De umbris idearum*, and *Candelaio* (all 1582). Settled in England 1583–5, making contact with Sidney and Greville, lecturing on Copernicus and participating in disputations at Oxford; published *La cena de le ceneri*, *De la causa*, *principio ed uno, De l'infinito universo e mondi, Lo spaccio de la bestia triofante* (all 1584) and *De gli eroici furori* (1585). After returning to Paris 1585, he visited Prague and various German cities, including Wittenberg, where he converted to Lutheranism and lectured on Aristotle's logic, and Frankfurt, where he published his Latin poems (1591). Lectured in Zurich, 1591. Same year Giovanni Mocenigo invited him to Venice, but subsequently denounced him to the Inquisition. Conveyed to Rome in 1593 and put on trial over many years, ultimately refusing to recant his philosophical opinions. Executed, 1600.

CAJETAN, THOMAS DE VIO, OP (Cajetanus) b. Gaeta, 1468; d. Rome, 1534. Dominican philosopher and theologian. In 1484 entered order. Studied at Naples, Bologna, Padua, 1484–93; 1494, *magister theologiae*. Professor of *Thomistic metaphysics* at Padua, 1495–7. Professor of theology at Pavia, 1497–9. *Lector* at Milan, 1499–1501. In 1501–18 held various high positions in Order, also teaching philosophy and Scripture at the University of Rome, 1501–8. At Fifth Lateran Council, 1512–17. Raised to cardinalate, 1517. Wrote commentaries on Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas; a Thomist, but incorporated certain of his own ideas (e.g. on the doctrine of analogy). Involved in debate on the immortality of the soul at Padua, where he had known Pomponazzi.

CAMPANELLA, TOMMASO, OP b. near Reggio Calabria, 1568; d. Paris, 1639. Italian theologian, philosopher, poet. Joined Dominican Order, 1582. Published *Philosophia sensibus demonstrata* (1591). Twice censured for Telesian views, but disregarded superiors. Tortured by Inquisition 1594, imprisoned at Rome, forced to retract. Arrested in 1599 for conspiring to replace Spanish rule in southern Italy with utopian republic; wrote *Città del sole* (*c.* 1602). Imprisoned at Naples, where he wrote: *De sensu rerum et magia*; *Atheismus triumphatus*; *Apologia pro Galileo; Theologica; Metaphysica*; *Astrologica*; Italian poetry. Freed 1626, but reimprisoned by Holy Office. Eventually released by Urban VIII, for whom he performed protective magical rites. Fled to Paris 1634, obtaining patronage of Richelieu and publishing/republishing several works.

CHARRON, PIERRE b. Paris, 1541; d. Paris, 1603. French Pyrrhonist philosopher. Studied classics at Sorbonne and jurisprudence at Orleans/Bourges; doctor of law, 1571. Studied theology and ordained, 1576. *Prédicateur*



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*ordinaire* to Queen Marguerite; theological canon in several dioceses; vicar-general at Agen and Bordeaux. Began close association with Montaigne, 1589. Wrote *Les trois véritez contre les athées, idolâtres, juifs, mahométans, hérétiques et schismatiques* (1593), arguing that the authority of the Church provides the sole certainty for man; *De la sagesse* (published 1601, revised edn 1604), emphasizing the truth of revelation as the only means of transcending natural law.

COLLEGIUM CONIMBRICENSE (*Commentarii conimbricenses*; Coimbra commentaries). A group of texts and commentaries on the major works of Aristotle, prepared by the Jesuits of the University of Coimbra between 1592 and 1598. Initiated by Pedro da Fonseca, who delegated its execution to Emmanuel de Goes. The *cursus* includes expositions of the *Physics* (1592), *De caelo* (1592), *Meteorology* (1592), *Parva naturalia* (1592), *Nicomachean Ethics* (1593), *De generatione et corruptione* (1597), and *De anima* (1598); *In universam dialecticam* (1606) is not of the exhaustive and rigorous quality of the volumes devoted to the central works of natural philosophy. After the first edition (at Coimbra and Lisbon), the commentaries were frequently reprinted for the next forty years (at Venice, Lyons, Cologne, Mainz) and were widely used throughout Europe during the first half of the seventeenth century.

CONTARINI, GASPARO b. Venice, 1483; d. Bologna, 1542. Italian churchman and Thomist theologian. Studied under Pomponazzi at Padua before embarking on various diplomatic missions, including negotiating the release of Clement VII from Emperor Charles V in 1527. Created cardinal in 1535. One of the nine commissioners appointed to consider Church reform. Papal legate at Diet of Ratisbon, 1540. Named cardinal-legate to Bologna, but died a few months later. Wrote on various philosophical and theological matters: e.g. *De immortalitate animae*, *De potestate pontificis*, *De libero arbitrio*. Critic of Alexandrist Aristotelianism; upheld personal immortality and the autonomy of the soul in relation to the body.

ERASMUS, DESIDERIUS b. Rotterdam, 1466/9; d. Basel, 1536. Dutch humanist and theologian. Educated by Brethren of the Common Life at Deventer. In 1487 became Augustinian canon at Steyn. Ordained priest, 1492. In 1495 studied at Collège de Montaigu, Paris. In Oxford 1499; Louvain 1502–4; Italy 1506–9; England again 1509–14, teaching at Cambridge and establishing contact with More/Colet circle. In Louvain 1517–21; Basel and Freiburg 1529–36. Wrote didactic and satirical works promoting combination of learning and piety (*philosophia Christi*) and urging Church reform: e.g. *Enchiridion militis christiani* (published 1503); *Moriae encomium* (1511); *Colloquia familiaria* (1518–33). Opposed Luther, with whom he debated on freedom of the will. Edited the Greek New Testament with Latin translation,



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patristic works, and classical texts, e.g. Aristotle, Cicero, Seneca. His writings were posthumously placed on the *Index*.

FICINO, MARSILIO b. Figline (Valdarno), 1433; d. Careggi (Florence), 1499. Italian Neoplatonic philosopher. Educated in Florence in humanities, philosophy, medicine. Began studying Greek *c.* 1456. Cosimo de' Medici commissioned him to translate *Corpus Hermeticum* (completed 1463) and Plato (published 1484). His commentaries on Plato were published separately in 1496. Ordained priest, 1473. Wrote influential commentary on *Symposium* (1469), explaining Platonic theory of love; *Theologia platonica* (1469–74, published 1482), on immortality of the soul; *De triplici vita* (1489), touching on magic and astrology; translated and commented on Plotinus (1492) and translated a number of later Neoplatonic writings (1497).

FONSECA, PEDRO DA, SJ b. Cortiçada (now Proença-a-Nova), 1528; d. Lisbon, 1599. Portuguese Jesuit philosopher and theologian. Entered order at Coimbra, 1548. In 1551 joined newly founded University of Évora; 1552–5 studied theology. From 1555 to 1561 professor of philosophy in Colégio das Artes, Coimbra, where he conceived the idea for a *Cursus Conimbricensis*, which he delegated to Emmanuel de Goes; main series of commentaries published in Coimbra 1592–8. Administrative duties in Order, 1561–4. From 1564 to 1566 professor of theology at Évora; 1570 *doctor theologiae* and chancellor of university. Official duties at Rome 1572–82, including contribution to Jesuit *Ratio studiorum*. Visitor of Portuguese province of Jesuits, 1589–92. In 1592 delegate to Jesuit General Congregation, Rome. Wrote *Institutionum dialecticarum libri VIII* (1564); *Isagoge philosophica* (1591); *In universam dialecticam* (published posthumously 1606).

JAVELLI, CRISOSTOMO, OP (Chrysostomus Javellus; Chrysostomus Casalensis) b. Canavese, 1470; d. Bologna, 1538. Thomist philosopher and theologian. Taught at Bologna. Wrote commentaries on the main works of Aristotle, e.g. *Compendium logicae isagogicum*. Defended Thomas Aquinas' exposition of Aristotle in several volumes, e.g. *Quaestiones super VIII libros Physices ad mentem D. Thomae*. In ethics favored Plato over Aristotle as closer to Christian values. Refuted Pomponazzi's *De immortalitate animae* in *Solutiones rationum*, published in conjunction with Pomponazzi's *Defensorium* (1519).

LANDINO, CRISTOFORO (Christophorus Landinus) b. Florence, 1424; d. Florence, 1498. Italian humanist and Platonist. Student at Volterra with Angiolo da Todi. From *c.* 1439 at Florence under Medici patronage. From 1458 professor of poetry and oratory at Florentine *Studio*, lecturing on classical poets, Petrarch, Dante. In 1467 Chancellor of *Parte Guelfa*; later secretary of Signoria until retirement. Member of Ficino's circle; cultivated



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Platonic studies. Wrote commentaries on Dante, Horace, Virgil; Latin poems; translated Pliny into Italian. Also wrote *Disputationes camaldulenses*, dialogue comparing the contemplative and active lives, giving higher value to the former.

LIPSIUS, JUSTUS (Joest Lips) b. Overyssche (Brussels), 1547; d. Louvain, 1606. Flemish humanist, Neostoic philosopher, philologist. Studied with Jesuits at Louvain. Published *Variae lectiones* (1567), dedicated to Cardinal Granvelle, who took him to Rome; engaged in philological study for two years. Traveled widely, teaching at Jena, 1572–4; Leiden, 1579–90; and Louvain, from 1592. Alternated religious adherence according to residence, but publicly confirmed his Catholicism at Mainz, 1590. Initiated the Neostoic movement with his *De constantia* (1584); later wrote the substantial *Physiologia Stoicorum* and *Manuductio ad stoicam philosophiam* (both 1604). Also wrote the influential political treatise *Politicorum, sive civilis doctrinae libri sex* (1589); and works on Roman history, e.g. *Admiranda, sive de magnitudine Romana libri IV* (1597). Edited classical texts, especially Seneca and Tacitus.

MACHIAVELLI, NICCOLÒ b. Florence, 1469; d. Florence, 1527. Italian political theorist and historian. Served in the chancellery of the Florentine Republic 1498–1512; 1499–1509 diplomatic missions in France, Italy, Germany; advocated militia to defend Florence. When the Medici returned to power in 1512, ousted from office. Tortured as suspect in anti-Medici plot 1513, but judged innocent and confined to Villa San Casciano, where composed *Il principe*. Eventually permitted to re-enter Florence. Participated in gatherings at the Orti Oricellari, to whom he read his *Discorsi* on Livy (written 1514–19). From 1519 served the Medici. When the Medici were again expelled, and republic reestablished in 1527, failed to gain office. Died soon afterwards. Wrote *Arte della guerra* (1521) and *Istorie fiorentine* (1525).

MELANCHTHON, PHILIPP b. Bretten (Baden), 1497; d. Wittenberg, 1560. German Lutheran humanist and educational reformer. Studied at Heidelberg; BA, 1511; and at Tübingen, 1512–18; MA, 1514; lectured on classics. Professor of Greek at Wittenberg, 1518; 1519 *baccalaureus biblicus*; 1519–60 professor of Greek and theology. Friend of Luther. After Reformation, systematized Luther's ideas, publicly defended them, and restructured religious education on Lutheran principles. Published editions of, and commentaries on, Thucydides, Aristotle, Cicero, Ovid, Quintilian; wrote Greek and Latin grammars; works on theology, natural and moral philosophy, mathematics, etc. Responsible for the wide use of Aristotle in Lutheran universities.

MOLINA, LUIS DE, SJ b. Cuenca, 1535; d. Madrid, 1600. Jesuit philosopher and theologian. Studied law at Salamanca 1551–2 and philosophy at



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Alcalá 1552–3. Joined Jesuits, 1553. Studied philosophy, 1554–8, and theology, 1558–62, at Coimbra; 1563–7 professor of philosophy. From 1568 to 1583 professor of theology at Évora. *Scriptor* at Évora, 1583–6; and at Cuenca, 1591–1600. Professor of moral theology at Jesuit College, Madrid, 1600. Formulated the doctrine known as Molinism in his *Concordia* (1558), telescoping efficacious and sufficient grace; resulted in controversy with Dominicans; resolved only when Clement VIII ordered special Congregation at Rome, 1598–1607. Also wrote *De iustitia et iure* (1593–1600); Aristotelian commentaries.

MONTAIGNE, MICHEL DE b. Montaigne (Périgord), 1533; d. Montaigne, 1592. French essayist. Educated Collège de Guyenne. Studied law at Bordeaux. Purchased judicial office. Became counselor to Parlement of Bordeaux. Followed court in Paris, Rouen; then abruptly retired to his estates to study and write, 1571. Published *Essais* Books I–II (1580). Neutral stance in religious wars, but upheld orthodoxy and authority. From 1576 increasing interest in skepticism. In 1580 traveled through France, Switzerland, Germany, and Italy. At Rome *Essais* approved by Church with slight alterations. Mayor of Bordeaux, 1581–5. In 1586 retired permanently. Published *Essais* Book III (1588). Invented the term *essai* and its form as a distinct literary genre. Early interest in Stoicism and Platonism, but later predominantly influenced by Pyrrhonian skepticism, arguing for a fideistic doctrine of submission to divine revelation as the only means of certainty.

MORE, THOMAS b. London, 1478; d. London, 1535. English humanist and lawyer. Chancellor 1529. Executed for denying Henry VIII's headship of the English Church. Produced translations from Greek, biographies, poems, political and religious writings. Friend of Erasmus, Colet, Holbein. His *Utopia* (1516), strongly influenced by Plato's *Republic*, gave rise to literary genre. Also responsible for popularizing Giovanni Pico in England.

NICHOLAS OF CUSA (Cusanus; Nikolaus Krebs) b. Cues, 1401; d. Todi, 1464. German philosopher, theologian, and churchman. Studied at Heidelberg, 1416; and Padua 1417–23, receiving doctorate in canon law. Studied Germanic law at Cologne. Ordained priest *c.* 1430. In 1432 represented Ulrich von Manderscheid at Council of Basel; wrote *De concordantia catholica* (1433) defending the conciliarist position; but later supported papal party at Council. In 1437 embassy to Constantinople; 1438/9 papal missions to Germany. Began work on *De docta ignorantia* (published 1440), elaborating concepts of *via negativa* and *coincidentia oppositorum*. Cardinal, 1446; 1450 bishop of Brixen (Bressanone), legate to Germany. Fall of Constantinople in 1453 stimulated composition of *De pace fidei*, an appeal for Christian unity. In 1458 at papal court of Pius II. In 1460 returned to Germany, where briefly imprisoned at Bruneck. Returned to Rome,



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appointed papal representative. Wrote several works on mathematics, theology; sermons influenced by Meister Eckhart.

NIFO, AGOSTINO (Suessanus) b. Sessa Aurunca, 1469/70; d. Sessa Aurunca, 1538. Italian philosopher and physician. Studied philosophy under Vernia at Padua, receiving degree *c.* 1490. Later learned Greek. Taught philosophy at Padua, 1492–9; at Naples and Salerno (also medicine), 1500–13; at Rome, from 1514; at Pisa, 1519–22; at Salerno, 1522–31 and 1532–5; and at Naples (also medicine), 1531–2. In 1520 named Count Palatine. Wrote many Aristotelian commentaries; wrote treatises on Averroes; edited Aristotle and Averroes (1495–6); replaced early Averroism with broader philosophical outlook, incorporating Platonic and Hermetic concepts. Also wrote on astronomy, dialectics, politics, moral philosophy, psychology.

PATRIZI, FRANCESCO DA CHERSO (Franciscus Patritius) b. Cherso, 1529; d. Rome, 1597. Italian Neoplatonic philosopher. Studied at Venice, 1542; at Ingolstadt, 1544–5; at Padua, 1547–54. From 1554 to 1557 served as secretary/administrator to several Venetian noblemen. In 1569–71 and 1574–7 traveled extensively in Mediterranean countries, including Cyprus, where he perfected his knowledge of Greek. From 1577/8 to 1591/2 first professor of Platonic philosophy at Ferrara. Polemics with T. Angelucci on Aristotle, 1584, and with Jacopo Mazzoni on poetics, 1587. From 1591/2 to 1597 professor of Platonic philosophy at the University of Rome; lectured on *Timaeus*. Wrote *Discussiones peripateticae* (1581), a history and critique of the Aristotelian tradition; *Nova de universis philosophia* (Ferrara, 1591; Venice, 1593), presenting his Neoplatonic theory of light metaphysics; he revised it in an unsuccessful attempt to defuse criticisms by the Inquisition. Also wrote *La città felice* (1553); *L'Eridano* (1557); *Della historia* (1560); treatises on poetics, rhetoric, military history, and mathematics. Translated Philoponus, Proclus; produced Latin editions of pseudo-Aristotelian *Theologia*, *Hermetica, Chaldaean Oracles*.

PAUL OF VENICE, OESA (Paulus Nicolettus Venetus) b. Udine, 1369/72; d. Padua, 1429. Italian philosopher and theologian. From 1390 studied philosophy, logic, and theology at Oxford, where influenced by Averroists, Ockhamists and earlier Augustinians (particularly Gregory of Rimini). Later visited Paris, where probably knew Pierre d'Ailly. In 1395 returned to Italy. By 1408 listed among masters at Padua. Venetian ambassador to Poland, 1413. From 1416 lectured at Padua. In 1420 elected Prior Provincial of Siena, repelling charges of heresy in same year. In 1424 lectured at Bologna. Visited Rome, 1426. Professor at Siena, 1427. Returned to Padua, 1428. Expositor of terminist logic; his *Logica* influential in Italy to end of seventeenth century. Also wrote *Summa naturalium*, widely distributed in manuscript and early printed editions; and commentaries



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on *Posterior Analytics, Physics, De generatione et corruptione* and *De anima*.

PÉRION, JOACHIM, OSB (Joachimus Perionius) b. Cormery (Touraine), 1498/9; d. Cormery, 1559. French humanist and theologian. Entered Benedictine Order 1517. From 1527 studied philosophy and theology at Paris: 1542 *doctor theologiae*; then professor of theology. Translated most of Aristotle into sub-Ciceronian Latin; provoked criticism and revision by J. L. d'Estrebay and N. Grouchy. Wrote *Pro Aristotele in Petrum Ramum orationes II* (1543), in reply to Ramus' *Aristotelicae animadversiones*; and *Pro Ciceronis Oratore contra Petrum Ramum oratio* (1547). Translated part of Plato's *Timaeus* (1540) and several Greek Fathers (1554–9).

PETRARCA, FRANCESCO (Petrarch) b. Arezzo, 1304; d. Arquà (Padua), 1374. Italian humanist and poet. From an exiled Florentine family which later moved to Avignon. Studied law at Montpellier and Bologna. Returned to papal court at Avignon 1326, taking minor orders. Visited Italy for long periods; crowned poet laureate at Rome, 1341. In 1353 moved to Italy; lived in Milan under Visconti patronage, 1353–61; in Venice, 1361–8; in Padua, from 1368. Included in his vast literary output are the Latin treatises *De otio religioso* and *De vita solitaria*; the polemical invective *De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia*; the Stoic ethical and psychological guide *De remediis*; the dialogue *Secretum*; the Latin epic poem *Africa*; the Italian lyric poetry cycle *Canzoniere*; and Latin letters, which he collected and edited.

PICCOLOMINI, FRANCESCO (Franciscus Carolus Piccolomineus) b. Siena, 1523; d. Siena, 1607. Italian philosopher. Studied at Siena, gaining doctorate in arts and medicine, 1546. Taught there until 1549. Professor of philosophy at Macerata, 1549–50; and at Perugia, 1550–60. From 1560 to 1564 extraordinary professor of natural philosophy at Padua; 1564–5 second ordinary professor of natural philosophy, succeeding MA Genoa; 1565–98 first professor there. From 1578 to 1594 controversy with Jacopo Zabarella on philosophical methodology, culminating in publication of *Comes politicus pro recta ordinis ratione propugnator* (1594). Also wrote *Peripateticae de anima disputationes* (1575); many expositions of Aristotelian works and philosophy.

PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA, GIANFRANCESCO b. Mirandola, 1469; d. Mirandola, 1533. Italian philosopher; Christian skeptic. Received early humanistic education at court of Ferrara; also influenced by Savonarola and uncle Giovanni Pico. From 1499 to 1502 conflict with brothers over title to Mirandola, leading to exile in various Italian cities, 1502–11. Visited Germany 1502, 1505. Briefly recovered Mirandola, 1511; but again exiled, 1511–14. Polemic with Pietro Bembo on imitation of classical authors, 1511–12; published *De imitatione libellus* (*c.* 1515). In 1514 returned to



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Mirandola, where assassinated by his nephew, 1533. Wrote on epistemology, psychology, astrology and divine providence: e.g. *De studio divinae et humanae philosophiae; De imaginatione; De falsitate astrologiae; De rerum praenotione; De providentia Dei*; and two treatises on physics. His major philosophical work, *Examen vanitatis doctrinae gentium* (1520), contrasts fallible human knowledge with divine revelation through Scriptures.

PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA, GIOVANNI b. Mirandola, 1463; d. Florence, 1494. Italian philosopher and humanist. Studied canon law at Bologna from 1477 and philosophy at Ferrara, 1479 and Padua, 1480–2. Visited the University of Paris sometime before 1487, assimilating scholastic ideas. Arrived in Florence, 1484, afterwards moving to Arezzo and Perugia. Studied Hebrew with Flavius Mithridates, and Arabic; expanded his knowledge of Averroism; began to study Cabala. Wrote *900 Theses* (1486), intending to dispute them in Rome; as an introduction to his theses wrote the *Oration*, afterwards named *Oration on the Dignity of Man* by sixteenth-century editors. Certain of his theses were declared heretical or dubious; he defended them in *Apologia*, thereby provoking Innocent VIII's condemnation of the whole work. Fled to France, but arrested and imprisoned at Vincennes, 1488. Released through intervention of Lorenzo de' Medici and other Italian princes; allowed to return to Florence. There wrote *Heptaplus* (1489), a mystical interpretation of the Genesis creation myth; *De ente et uno* (1492), attempting to harmonize Platonic and Aristotelian ontological doctrines; *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem* (published 1496). In final years became a follower of Savonarola. In 1493 Alexander VI lifted censures.

PLETHO, GEORGIUS GEMISTUS b. Constantinople (or Mistra), *c.* 1360; d. Mistra, *c.* 1452. Byzantine humanist and philosopher. Established Platonic school, and held high office for several years, at Mistra in Morea; Bessarion was among his pupils. In 1438–9 among Byzantine delegation to Council of Ferrara/Florence, giving public lectures and stimulating interest in Platonic and Neoplatonic writings. His major treatise, the *Laws*, is a systematic exposition modeled on Plato's work; survives only in fragments because ecclesiastical authorities ordered all copies to be destroyed as heretical. Also wrote an influential comparison of Platonic and Aristotelian doctrines. Considered a neo-pagan by some modern authorities.

POLIZIANO, ANGELO (Angelus Ambroginus Politianus) b. Montepulciano, 1454; d. Florence, 1494. Italian humanist, philologist, poet. Mainly active in Florence, where protégé of Lorenzo de' Medici and tutor in Medici household until 1480. Taught at the Florentine *Studio* 1480–94; wrote *Lamia* (1492–3), a *praelectio* to his course on Aristotle's *Prior Analytics*; also *Praelectio de dialectica*. Translated into Latin *Enchiridion* of Epictetus and *Problems* attributed to Alexander of Aphrodisias. His philological



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researches on classical texts and prescriptions for prose style were widely influential and helped popularize a philological approach to philosophical texts in universities. Wrote poetry in Greek, Latin, and Italian (*Stanze* and *Orfeo*).

POMPONAZZI, PIETRO (Petrus Pomponatius) b. Mantua, 1462; d. Bologna, 1525. Italian philosopher; strongly influenced by Alexander of Aphrodisias; rejected Averroism, advocating return to Aristotelianism purified of non-Aristotelian accretions. Studied at Padua; MA, 1487; taught philosophy, 1488–96; *doctor medicinae*, 1496. From 1496 to 1499 taught logic at court of Alberto Pio. Professor of philosophy at Padua, 1499–1509. Briefly taught at Ferrara 1509 before returning to Mantua, 1510–11. Taught philosophy at Bologna, 1511–25. Published *De immortalitate animae* (1516), which was burnt by authorities in Venice and which provoked counter-attacks from Gasparo Contarini, Agostino Nifo, and others; to which he replied in *Apologia* (1518). Also wrote *De naturalium effectuum causis sive de incantationibus* (written 1520; published 1556), attempting a naturalistic explanation of thaumaturgy; *De fato* (published 1567); many expositions of Aristotelian works. Extensive manuscript notes for his lecture courses survive.

RAMUS, PETRUS (Pierre de la Ramée) b. Euth (near Soissons), 1515; d. Paris, 1572. French philosopher and humanist. Studied at Paris from 1527; MA, 1536. Appointed principal of Collège de Presles, 1546–72. Royal lecturer, 1551. Charpentier's *Animadversiones* (1554) instigated a polemic continuing into 1560s. Conversion to Calvinism 1561 made him vulnerable in increasingly unstable condition of French politics from 1567, so withdrew from Paris. Visited Germany, Strasbourg, Basel, 1568–70. Returned to Paris, 1570. Murdered during the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre, 1572. Wrote commentaries on Euclid, Plato's *Letters*, and several Aristotelian works; but, after publishing the *Aristotelicae animadversiones* (1543), gained reputation as a virulent opponent of Aristotelian logic. His own reformed system of logic, which despite criticism of traditional forms retained key Peripatetic concepts such as the syllogism, reached definitive form in *Dialectique* (1555) and was widely popular, especially in Protestant Europe. Also wrote *De religione Christiana* (published posthumously, 1576).

REISCH, GREGOR, Ord. Cart. b. Balingen, *c.* 1467; d. Freiburg i. Br., 1525. German Carthusian and encyclopedist. Matriculated at University of Freiburg, 1487; BA, 1488; MA, 1489. Entered Carthusian Order *c.* 1496. Became prior first at Klein-Basel, 1500–2; and then at Freiburg i. Br., 1503–25. Taught Johannes Eck. Correspondent of Erasmus, who claimed that his opinion had the authority of an oracle among Germans. His



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chief work, *Margarita philosophica* (1503), is an encyclopedia in catechetical form, widely used as a textbook; it covered, in addition to the subjects of the *trivium* and *quadrivium*, natural philosophy, psychology, and ethics.

SANCHES, FRANCISCO (Sánchez; Sanctius) b. Tuy or Valença do Minho, 1550/1; d. Toulouse, 1623. Portuguese physician and philosopher. Studied at Collège de Guyenne, Bordeaux, 1562–9. Studied medicine at Rome, 1569–73. *Baccalaureus* of medicine at Montpellier, 1573; 1574 doctor and professor of medicine there. Moved to Toulouse, 1575. Director of Hôtel de Dieu-St. Jacques, Toulouse, 1582–1612. From 1585, professor of liberal arts in the university there; and from 1612 professor of medicine. Wrote medical works; commentaries on Aristotle's *De divinatione per somnum, De longitudine*, and the pseudo-Aristotelian *Physiognomica*; *Obiectiones et erotemata super geometricas Euclidis demonstrationes* (1575); *Carmen de cometa anni 1577* (1578). His most influential book, *Quod nihil scitur* (1576), attacks scholastic method, asserting that perfect knowledge is unattainable by man, who must be content with the limited information attainable from cautious and rigorous experiment and observation; became standard work of skeptical philosophy.

SOTO, DOMINGO DE, OP b. Segovia, 1495; d. Salamanca, 1560. Spanish Dominican philosopher and theologian. Studied at Alcalá *c.* 1512–16. From 1516 studied at Paris under John Mair. Taught philosophy at Alcalá, 1520–4. *Doctor theologiae*, 1525; joined Dominicans at Burgos. Taught philosophy and theology at Salamanca, 1525–49, 1552–60. In 1540–2, 1544–5, 1550–2, 1556–60 Prior of St. Esteban. At Council of Trent, 1545–7. Confessor to Charles V in Germany, 1548–50. President of Junta de Valladolid (concerning wars against the Indians), 1550–1. Associated with the sixteenth-century scholastic revival. Wrote commentaries on Aristotle's logical works, *Physics, De anima* and the fourth book of Peter Lombard's *Sententiae*; also wrote *De iustitia et iure libri X* (1553–4).

SUÁREZ, FRANCISCO, SJ b. Granada, 1548; d. Lisbon, 1617. Spanish Jesuit philosopher, theologian, jurist. Entered Society of Jesus, 1564. Studied law, philosophy and theology at Salamanca. Taught philosophy at Segovia, 1571–4. Taught theology at Valladolid, 1574–5; at Segovia and Avila, 1575–6; at Valladolid, 1576–80; at Collegio Romano, 1580–5; at Alcalá, 1585–93; at Salamanca, 1593–7; at Coimbra, 1597–1616. Visited Rome, 1604–6. Prominent in the Counter-Reformation revival of scholasticism. Wrote *De legibus* (1612); commentaries and treatises on many works of Aristotle.

TELESIO, BERNARDINO b. Cosenza, 1509; d. Cosenza, 1588. Italian natural philosopher. Studied philosophy and mathematics at Padua, obtaining



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doctorate 1535. Published three versions of his major work, *De rerum natura* (1565, 1570, and much enlarged in 1586). Later years were mainly – except for long visits to Naples – passed in Cosenza, where he founded *Accademia Cosentina* to promote study of natural philosophy according to his own principles and methods. Rejected Aristotelian doctrines and claimed authority for his own system based on sense experience and nature.

TOLETUS, FRANCISCUS, SJ (Francisco de Toledo) b. Cordoba, 1532; d. Rome, 1596. Spanish Jesuit philosopher and theologian. Studied philosophy at Zaragoza or Valencia and theology at Salamanca while teaching philosophy there. Joined Jesuits, 1558. In 1559–62 professor of philosophy at Collegio Romano; professor of theology, 1562–9. Preached in papal court. Sent on diplomatic missions to various countries from 1571, including that to convert Henri IV of France, 1596. Cardinal, 1593. Wrote influential commentaries on Aristotelian works, including *Physics, De anima*, and *De generatione et corruptione*; also a commentary on the *Summa theologiae*.

VALLA, LORENZO b. Rome, 1406; d. Rome, 1457. Italian humanist. Studied at Rome. Taught *eloquentia* at Pavia, 1429–33. From 1437 secretary to Alfonso of Aragon. In 1448 returned to Rome, becoming papal secretary and professor at university. Developed a philological approach to classical, literary, scriptural, and historical scholarship: e.g. *De falso credita et ementita Constantini donatione declamatio; Elegantiae linguae Latinae; Collatio Novi Testament*. His *Dialecticae disputationes* attacks Aristotelian and scholastic logic and reformulates principles of dialectic on the basis of rhetoric. Also wrote *De libero arbitrio*; and *De voluptate*, later reworked as *De vero bono*, examining Stoic, Epicurean and Christian conceptions of the true good. Translated Herodotus and Thucydides.

VERNIA, NICOLETTO (Nicolettus Vernias Theatinus) b. Chieti, 1420; d. Vicenza, 1499. Italian philosopher. Studied at Pavia. Student of Paul of Pergula in logic at Venice and of Gaetano da Thiene in natural philosophy at Padua. *Doctor artium*, Padua, 1458; 1465–99 succeeded Gaetano as professor of philosophy; 1495 *doctor medicinae*; his pupils included Agostino Nifo and Giovanni Pico. Edited scholastic texts. Most of his earlier works were straightforwardly Averroistic: e.g. *Quaestiones an dentur universalia realia*, which attempts to demonstrate agreement between Averroes and Albertus Magnus on the doctrine of *inchoatio formarum*. Gradually withdrew from extreme Averroism under influence of Ermolao Barbaro and in an effort to reassert his orthodoxy after Pietro Barozzi's *Decretum contra disputantes de unitate intellectus* (1489).

VETTORI, PIER (Petrus Victorius) b. Florence, 1499; d. Florence, 1585. Florentine humanist. In 1522–3 visited Barcelona and Rome. Active in defense of Florence, 1529–30. Private study at San Casciano, 1530–4. In



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1534 returned to Florence and worked on edition of Cicero. In 1537 visited Rome. From 1538 professor of Latin at Florentine *Studio*; 1543, of Greek language and literature; 1548 of moral philosophy. Wrote mainly philological commentaries on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (1584), *Politics* (1576), *Rhetoric* (1548), and *Poetics* (1560).

VIMERCATO, FRANCESCO (Franciscus Vicomercatus) b. Milan, *c.* 1512; d. Turin, *c.* 1571. Italian philosopher. Studied philosophy at Bologna, Pavia, Padua. From *c.* 1540 taught logic in Collège du Plessis, Paris. *Lecteur royal* in Greek and Latin philosophy, 1542–61. In 1543–4 supported polemic against Ramus. Professor of philosophy at University of Mondovi, 1561; councilor to duke of Savoy; 1567–70 ducal ambassador to Milan. Wrote commentaries on many Aristotelian works; also, *De anima rationali peripatetica* (1543); *De principiis naturalium* (posthumously published 1596). Contributed to Renaissance revival of Plato–Aristotle *comparatio* with his *De placitis naturalibus Platonis et Aristotelis* (MS, *c.* 1540).

VIVES, JUAN LUIS b. Valencia, 1492; d. Bruges, 1540. Spanish humanist, philosopher, educational and social theorist. Studied at Valencia, 1508; and at Collège de Montaigu, Paris, 1509–12. Tutored and studied privately in Bruges, 1512–16. Taught privately at Louvain, 1517–23. In contact with Erasmus. Published *De initiis, sectis et laudibus philosophiae* and *In pseudodialecticos* (both 1520) and a massive commentary on Augustine's *De civitate Dei* (1522). Lectured at Oxford, 1523–5. Attended English court, 1526–8. Returned to tutoring and private study in Bruges 1528–36, publishing *De disciplinis* (1531). Counselor to duchess of Nassau, 1537–9. Published *De anima et vita* (1538). Strong opponent of scholastic philosophy, especially logic; influenced by Lorenzo Valla; important influence on contemporary English humanism.

ZABARELLA, JACOPO (Giacomo; Jacobus) b. Padua, 1533; d. Padua, 1589. Paduan Aristotelian philosopher. Studied humanities, logic, natural philosophy, and mathematics at Padua; *doctor artium*, 1553; held professorship of logic and natural philosophy. Member of the Accademia degli Stabili. Wrote influential works on logic (in particular on method) and natural philosophy, including *Opera logica* (1578); *Tabulae logicae* (1580); *De naturalis scientiae constitutione* (1586); *De rebus naturalibus* (1590); also, many commentaries on Aristotelian works.

ZIMARA, MARCANTONIO b. S. Pietro in Galatina (Lecce), *c.* 1475; d. Padua, 1532. Italian philosopher. From *c.* 1497 studied philosophy at Padua under Nifo and Pomponazzi; 1501–5 taught logic while studying medicine there; 1505–9 professor of natural philosophy. Moved to S. Pietro in Galatina, 1509–18. Professor of natural philosophy and theoretical medicine at Salerno, 1518/19–22. Lectured on metaphysics at Naples,



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1522–3. Professor of philosophy at Padua, 1525–8. Edited works by Jean de Jandun, Albertus Magnus and Johannes Baconthorpe. Wrote commentaries and treatises on Aristotelian and Averroistic works and themes. His *Tabula dilucidationum in dictis Aristotelis et Averrois* (1537; reprinted frequently) became standard indexes to Aristotle and Averroes.



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